



# Improving Urban Living Options for Families

A Comprehensive Analysis and Recommendation on  
Making Cities Family Friendly

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*A Comprehensive Analysis and Recommendation  
On Making Cities Family Friendly*

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*"If we can build a successful city for children, we can build a successful city for all people."*

- David Byrne -





## Abstract

Our nation is witnessing what many have described as the next great migration. Millions of Americans are returning to city centers, from hip urban professionals, to the silver haired retirees of the boomer years. In this process cities have designed and planned families, particularly those with children, out of this migration. This is particularly apparent to middle class families. Policies, initiatives, and investments have ignored the opportunity to invest in our city's' futures through families and children. This has resulted in making highly urbanized areas as a home for families more complex and unattainable than it need be.

This research will focus on these key questions: *What are the benefits for families, particularly children, of living in a highly urbanized environment? What have been the challenges for retaining and attracting families into living in highly urbanized areas? What policies have been implemented to improve the livability of highly urbanized areas and what were their impacts?* This research will examine the challenges that both families and cities face in crafting urban family friendly environments. As will be demonstrated, several cities have taken initiatives that focus on housing or education, but few have addressed the complex and interconnected issues that can create an environment that is not only beneficial to families, but improves the quality of life for all residents while enhancing the efficiency of cities. The failure to establish the connections and relationships of elements such as housing, health, transportation, education, safety, diversity, and finances has lead to a failure to create environments that are truly welcoming and supportive of families. This study will find that addressing these complex and interconnected variables creates urban environments that are eclectic and vibrant increasing the quality of life for all. Additionally, this study will

seek to prove that through small policy changes with families and children in consideration, cities are inherently investing in their futures and the shared investment of their communities.



# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	9
Definitions .....	10
Inroduction and Methodology.....	15
Literature Review .....	19
<i>Modern History of Cities and Families .....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Why Should We Care? .....</i>	<i>21</i>
Health .....	23
Finances .....	28
Diversity .....	31
Safety .....	33
The Opposition .....	34
What Has Been Done?.....	37
<i>Vancouver, British Columbia .....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Seattle, Washington .....</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>Philadelphia, Pennsylvania .....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Other Locations .....</i>	<i>41</i>
The State of Atlanta for Families .....	45
Recommendations .....	55
Areas of Further Research .....	65
Conclusion .....	67





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# Definitions

I have defined a series of working definitions that will be used and introduced throughout this research and recommendation proposal. To further clarify the intent and scope a series of definitions have been identified as well as background and methodology as to why these terms are applied in their appropriate manner.

**Downtown and Downtown Adjacent:** In 1984 the U.S. Census discontinued issuing population data delineated by a traditionally defined “downtown.” Furthermore this research’s intent is not to limit its scope by a narrow range of a few city blocks. Many cities have multiple high density and diverse districts, and limiting the proposal to downtowns exclusively would be ineffective in regards to the goals of this research and its subsequent proposals. As such, we will refer to the areas of concern utilizing Christopher Leinberger’s definitions of downtown and downtown adjacent (Leinberger, 2009). While European definitions limit urbanized areas to central cities, in America we do not, and the term urbanized area is often used to refer to an entire metropolitan region including its suburbs. Downtown covers the Central Business District (CBD) and traditionally the oldest and most dense part of the city. Including downtown adjacent allows us to include Midtowns, Uptowns, select urban Transit Oriented Developments (TOD), and other high-density urban areas that are in close proximity to a traditional downtown. This allows for the exclusion of suburban style neighborhoods

within the city limits and the inclusion of a multitude of dense urban environments that are not part of the CBD. Regardless, our focus is on neighborhoods and districts whose density exceeds that of traditional suburbs, is highly walkable, accessible by transit, and has a diverse and eclectic mix of residential types, businesses, city services, and cultural amenities.

Using the terms downtown and downtown adjacent remain subjective as each city is different. A city such as Chicago would have a multitude of neighborhoods included, from The Loop north to Lincoln Park and west to Wicker Park. New York is similar in that four of its five boroughs could be given consideration in this research’s application. A city such as Atlanta would be more limited to Downtown, Midtown, Buckhead, and emerging communities such as Lindbergh. Therefore, high-density urban transit oriented developments (TOD) should be considered as well. Every city is constantly transforming so this research is not meant to establish a permanent boundary around particular neighborhoods. Atlanta neighborhoods such as The Old Fourth Ward, Inman Park, and Castleberry Hill are quickly gaining density and diversity and could be considered as highly favorable urban neighborhoods that could or will possibly be considered in the near future. Figure 1.1 provides a graphic example of the type of neighborhoods being considered.



**Family Friendly:** The concept of a “family friendly” city is not one stuffed with Disney characters and murals of unicorns and rainbows on every street, nor is it one where every residence has a child. Creating a homogeneous environment made up of one household type and only developed for their enjoyment would do very little to solve or promote an eclectic living environment, and would disadvantage the benefits of a family living in an urban core. The parameters that create and define an area or neighborhood as being family friendly will be more thoroughly investigated later, but the initial scope of such an environment can be defined by the following elements, those which are mutually desirable across all age ranges and household structures:

- Accessible green space (i.e. parks, playgrounds, walking and biking trails, etc.)
- Cultural amenities (i.e. museums, performing arts facilities, performance venues)
- Accessible and relative close proximity of educational facilities including public schools and libraries that meet a minimum threshold of quality
- Accessible and relatively close proximity of daily services integral to a family’s needs and routine daily structure (grocery stores, day care facilities, household goods, etc.)
- Safe neighborhoods, in regards to both physical safety and protection from criminal elements as well as automobile and other forms of transportation.
- Overall accessibility via transportation options, by providing a diverse and accessible network of walkability, transit, bicycles, and automobiles, that support a logical “travel chain.”

The elements listed are not the only elements that create a family friendly environment. This research will explore other parameters and their effects such as health, design, and social interaction, but

the items listed above represent a universal core of parameters that can define what would make a community family friendly regardless of their urban or suburban setting. They also represent elements that are interconnected and dependent on one another, in order to establish an eclectic, efficient, and harmonious community.

**Family:** A family means different things to different people and can encompass a complex and diverse array of relationships, ranging from multi-generational households to extended friendships. For the purpose of this research we define family as any household where a resident is under the age of 18 years old regardless of marital status, or household composition. Our concern is creating an environment that is accessible and conducive to the growth and development of families and their youth. Binding our research to the limitations of what constitutes a family based upon religious or civic definitions would be an injustice to those most concerned in this proposal.

**Moderate to Middle Income:** We will define moderate to middle income family households based upon U.S. Census data and median family income. Using this measure per city will allow us to adjust our measures based upon the fluctuating income differences per region when assessing different cities. For the purpose of this research we will define moderate to middle income as those whose annual household income is between 75% and 125% of the median family income. This allows us to address households that fall into the “Drive Until You Qualify” status and those simply priced out of urban centers whose cost of living has grown exponentially and have been left with no viable alternative option. Those that are low income were excluded based upon existing low-income housing initiatives in place. As flawed as many of these policies may be, it will be beyond the scope of this research to

address. As will be presented through the research, urban cores have been evolving into places that welcome or assist only those at the economic extremes. Matters beyond housing, such as education, transportation, and public amenities that will be discussed for improvements, will likely create benefits for all residents, regardless of income status.





*"Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody"*

– Jane Jacobs –

# Introduction & Methodology

American cities and dense urbanized areas have experienced a great resurgence. After decades of suburban sprawl depleting the urban cores through white flight, office campus relocations, and urban renewal, they have become magnets for residents and businesses again. Between July 1st of 2011 and April 1st of 2012, twenty-seven of the largest fifty-one metropolitan regions saw their cities grow faster than their accompanying suburbs (Dockterman, 2012). While many have dismissed this as a consequence of the current economic conditions of the country, it has marked the first time in nearly 100 years that cities grew faster than suburbs (Dockterman, 2012). This led to the resurgence of the urban cores of Atlanta, Philadelphia, and Washington, while redefining those of emerging cities such as Austin, Seattle, and Denver. Once dying and crime ridden sections of the urban core have flourished to life with restaurants, shops and new housing. Transit has returned to ridership levels not matched since the 1960's, and for some, even decades prior. The new younger working generation has seen a strong preference for urban living, while rejecting many of the suburban landscapes that were the hallmark of the boomer generation, enough so that Christopher Leinberger finds that 77% of millennials want to live in downtowns (Leinberger, 2009). Millennials have not been the only age cohort to lead the resurgence of cities. Retirees and empty nesters have found efficiency in their lifestyles improve by living smaller and being closer to their everyday needs, providing them with freedom and mobility. Aging in Place initiatives have further enhanced these opportunities where dense urban communities can now provide independence for our nation's seniors. Cities, developers, and planning agencies have responded to this demand by providing entertainment amenities and condo high rises that have appealed to both demographics.

During this resurgence cities focused on a limited demographic for growth. While development patterns of locating housing and offices around transit stations and in the urban core proved fruitful, the needs of families were largely ignored and not understood. Those between the ages of 25 and 34 evolved into the most coveted cohort for many cities. While birth rates may have, and continue to decline in America, the millennials and urban pioneers that helped resurrect our urban areas have often been forced to move out to the suburban fringe if they do choose to have children. Lack of viable housing options, poor school quality, and incompatible and disorganized land uses have resulted in fractured communities devoid of common daily needs, often tailored specifically to the needs of younger adults or retirees. Those who do find appropriate housing and communities with needs that satisfy the challenging demands of raising a family, face the dilemma of education. Those who have the means enroll their children in private schools, while those that cannot bus their children to suburban schools or send them to inadequate ones, further reducing the financial efficiency of these households while weakening the local education system.

These examples represent only a fraction of the challenges cities face in attracting families, and the challenges that families face when attempting to remain or relocate to an urbanized area. Education and housing may be some of the most prominent issues determining the desire of families to locate in an urbanized area, but there are a multitude of other factors that influence a family's decision, as well as the core issues of housing and education. As will be discussed later, cities such as San Francisco, where suburban housing costs and educational quality are marginally different from the urban core, other factors remain at odds with the needs of families. This research and analysis will investigate this issue

from both the perspective of families and cities. The value of families, particularly those with children, and their influence and effect on a community are often underestimated. They can promote a diverse mix of businesses and housing types, opening possibilities to new retail and commercial services that are essential to eclectic and diverse environments. They present an opportunity to improve neighborhoods and education systems, cultivate social interaction, and create healthy and vibrant environments that are beneficial to residents of all ages. Furthermore, cities that have been on the losing end of residential tax revenue and distribution of social and city services, are provided with a more competitive advantage, retaining more residents in their peak earning years. They also represent a stable tax revenue base for cities, while bringing overall stability to their community. The presence of families and children symbolize a community that is investing in its future and retaining its residents, rather than entering a cycle of replacing residents through migration. A city committed to retaining residents of all age ranges further demonstrates their interests in creating a community that is diverse and accepting of all.

It also must be said that this research does not expect a full revolution of families residing in cities. There are some that will be predisposed to want to do so and others that are adamantly against an urban environment for their family. There will also be residents of cities who do not want to see their neighborhoods occupied with children. As Americans we are a fiercely individualistic society, and cities and children, in some ways, represent the antithesis to individualism. The central theme of this research is about providing choice. As of today we provide but one option for families. While anyone can live where they desire and have the freedom to choose, we overwhelmingly subsidize and support suburban living while making urban living for a family

challenging to nearly impossible. We do not seek to change the minds of all, but we seek the opportunity to provide options for those that desire them.

The first section of this research will focus on why city and urbanized living is beneficial to both families and cities, and in some instances, why suburban living has proven to be damaging. Factors such as health, fiscal efficiency for cities and families, cultural amenities and diversity will be points of discussion in the benefits of urbanized living. This will also include a historical analysis on the perception as well as the usage of cities as places to raise families. We will analyze existing literature and studies that have been put forth demonstrating the positive and negative impacts of each environment.

The second section will examine existing policies that have been implemented and gauge their success and ability to attract families. Cities such as Vancouver (BC), Seattle, Austin, Portland (OR) and Philadelphia, will be examined for their initiatives and programs. We will utilize census data and existing reports to examine the population trends of the city as a whole, as well as the urban core.

The third section will focus in on the City of Atlanta and its existing conditions of Midtown and Downtown relevant to the ability to attract and retain family households. We will utilize U.S. Census Bureau data to analyze population trends in comparison to the city and region as a whole. We will focus in on attributes such as education, housing, cultural and recreation amenities, and transportation options. Each of these attributes will be placed in comparison with other cities to gauge their successes and deficiencies and how they relate to families.

Lastly, this research will focus on a comprehensive solution for Atlanta, Georgia. Amongst cities with the highest concentration of single and unmarried

residents, its suburban fringe continues to significantly out perform the urban core in attracting families. This is not a unique problem to Atlanta, but for the long term viability and health of the city it is an important issue. Likewise, the solutions and recommendations proposed for the city are not exclusive to Atlanta. The goal is to create and develop recommendations that can be adopted by a multitude of cities.

Attracting families to cities has often been dismissed as an exercise in futility. While it has baffled planners and city officials it is often viewed as a problem that cannot be solved. Most cities have chosen to focus solely on housing or education, not

realizing that there are a multitude of components that are interconnected and interdependent on one another. As a consequence, this research will take a comprehensive approach; understanding that providing adequate sized and priced housing will not solve the disparities in education. A new school will not resolve transportation issues, and a new light rail line will not be the ultimate solution to diversity. The issues that will be presented in this research are interdependent upon one another, and that the success of one will not equate to the solution of all challenges. Figure 1.2 demonstrates a graphic representation of how these challenges are interrelated for families and cities.

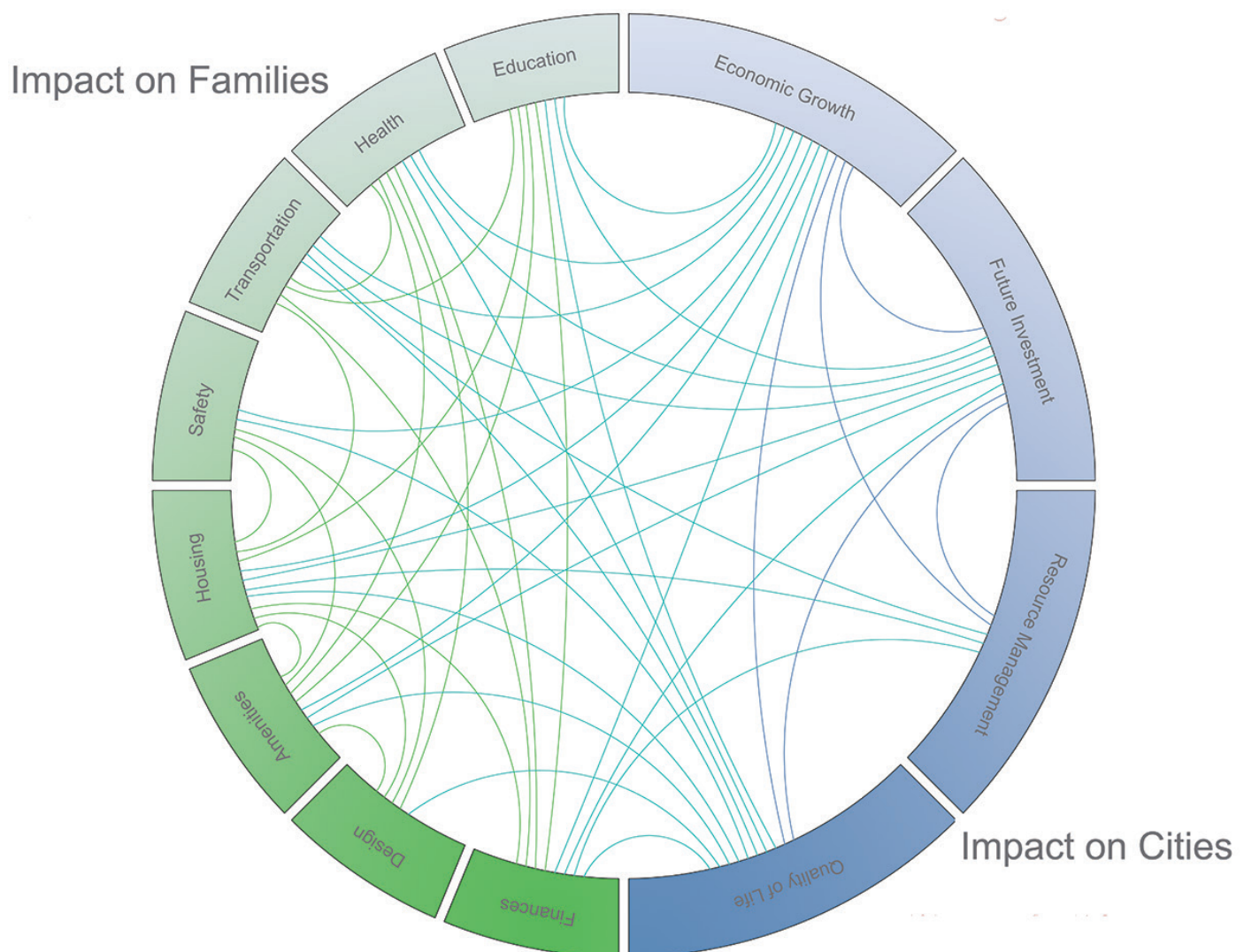


Figure 1.2 - Relationship Between Families, Cities, and Their Important Factors

*“Cities have always been the fireplaces of civilization, whence light and heat radiated out into the dark.”*

– Theodore Parker –



# 1 - Literature Review

## 1.1 - Modern History of Cities and Families

Cities have long been perceived as antithetical to healthy family creation and development. Starting earlier with the writings of Jacob Riis in *How the Other Half Lives*, cities were recognized as places that were dirty, unsafe, and unfit places for nearly all citizens, and particularly families. One room tenements were believed to be the root cause of issues of morality and social ills, and particularly damaging to a child's well being (Hall, 2002). Accounts of child endangerment, poor health, and partaking in adult oriented activities, such as alcohol abuse and prostitution, were seen as direct consequences of the urban living environment (Hall, 2002). This image, typically dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries of the industrial revolution was one that many cities were not able to dispel. A growing concern developed from the accounts of those such as Riis and Lord Shaftesbury that lead the drive to reform laws and provide protection for those living in such squalor (Hall, 2002). Ultimately the dream was established of expansive fields of green grass, sprawling homes, and the tranquility of rural living. What started as a dream to escape the oppressing squalor and filth of industrial revolution cities, developed into the predetermined ritual and expectation of a majority of Americans. Those who had children were expected to follow the same path as those before, often culminating in raising a family in a low density, single use, and suburban neighborhood. Rather than attempting to challenge this predetermined disposition, most come to view the suburbs as their only alternative, escaping the perceived dangers of urbanized living, giving little thought to its potential consequences.

To understand how we arrived at this predetermined sequencing we have to understand how government policy served as a facilitator. What originated as an unattainable dream achieved by few yet imagined by many, became the norm through policy initiatives

and the promotion of particular lifestyle elements. Homeownership became the centerpiece of the American Dream, with the dream not only rooted in the physical home, but the opportunity to own the land that it rests on. To promote this dream and to fuel the real estate and construction industries, home mortgages and down payment rates were significantly reduced due to government backing and subsidy, following the great depression and World War II (Gallagher, 2013). To address the housing shortage from pent up demand and returning World War II veterans, suburban tract housing and subdivisions represented the ultimate solution of efficiency (Gallagher, 2013). Homeownership has its merits, and those will not be disputed nor debated in this research, but the government initiatives that were created were clearly biased to the ownership of new single-family suburban homes and not the options of inner city multi-family living or rehabilitation. FHA backing and lending institutions prevented the lending of money to urban, multi-family, and rehabilitated housing (Gallagher, 2013). This may be considered the moment where alternatives to single family, suburban housing no longer became options. Obtaining a piece of the "countryside" became the goal of nearly every American, leaving the city to service their needs of employment and entertainment. In the waning years of the 20th century even many of these services shifted to the suburbs through lifestyle centers and corporate office parks.

The dream of the single family suburban home could not have been realized without the advent of the personal automobile, also heavily subsidized. Individual transportation has always been an essential component, even in city dwelling, but the mass production and popularization of the automobile further permitted the spreading out of America. What offered freedom and opportunity, also

made low-density living feasible for all. The transfer of funding from transit, rail, and bus transportation into roads, highways, and freeways caused further decline to the urban core, where ultimately only the families without the means to escape were the only ones remaining in the city. Public housing projects and dilapidated apartments became the majority of the remaining housing stock within the urban core. By the mid to later part of 20th century white flight and urban renewal pulled families away as well, leading to the decline of city tax revenue and a near collapse of most of the public school systems in major American cities. Crime and safety became compromised as city's ever shrinking budgets forced more and more cutbacks to city resources. Many of these problems came to peak in the late 1960's and 1970's. Race riots were waged in many major cities as the poor and minorities of cities were left to deal with the mess that was created and left for them. Poor schools, unsafe streets, and reduced public services plagued cities such as New York, St. Louis, and Atlanta. The images of poverty, racial strife, and crime created lasting images in the minds of many citizens. Furthermore cities such as St. Louis did everything within their abilities to lure high wealth and single residents while leaving out families, in a final effort to restore the central city and its tax revenue. This was primarily accomplished through the zoning and support of developers that pursued and proposed projects that were size restricted and marketed towards students, singles, and well to do retirees (Gordon, 2008). The goal of such development was to reduce the demands on the local education system, further saving municipalities money during difficult and challenging fiscal times, ignoring the fact that these schools would still be a necessity for those who couldn't escape. This reduction of services would have severe long term consequences that many were not able to predict or see. These types of initiatives would eventually be referred to as "hysterectomy zoning" (Gordon,

2008). Rather than creating a city for all, cities attempted to attract targeted cohorts that were more self-sufficient and less demanding on city services.

As doom as the decline of cities were in the mid to latter part of the 20th century, it did not spell obsolescence of cities. Many of America's youth, born and raised in suburban locations, began to move back to the center. Young professionals, college students, and various other demographic groups began to rehabilitate older residential areas and neglected industrial neighborhoods. From New York's SoHo, one of the pioneering urban rehabilitations, to Midtown Atlanta, new residents began to clean up and develop areas once abandoned. These "urban pioneers" were later joined by empty nesters seeking to downsize their living and simplify their lives, adding an older demographic to urbanized areas as well. Cities responded by building sleek new high-rise condos, apartments, entertainment districts, and sports venues. From 1970 to 2000 a dramatic shift took place in the demographic composition of downtowns. As illustrated in figure 1.3, all age cohorts saw an increase in downtown population living with the exception of those over 65 and those under 18 (Birch, 2005). While birth rates have continued to decline, it does very little to explain the plummeting rate at which those under the age of 18 live in urbanized areas, the fastest decline of all cohort groups. Those over 65 can be explained by the rise of retirement communities, a type of living that was all but foreign prior to the latter 20th century (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & Speck, 2000). Cities focused on the attraction of professionals, rather than cultivating an environment that was beneficial to our citizens with the greatest need, ultimately banishing them to the suburbs. This allowed for the suburbs to develop retirement communities and public schools, that over time, evolved into storage facilities for our nation's future and past (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & Speck, 2000).

### Household Composition by Neighborhood Type

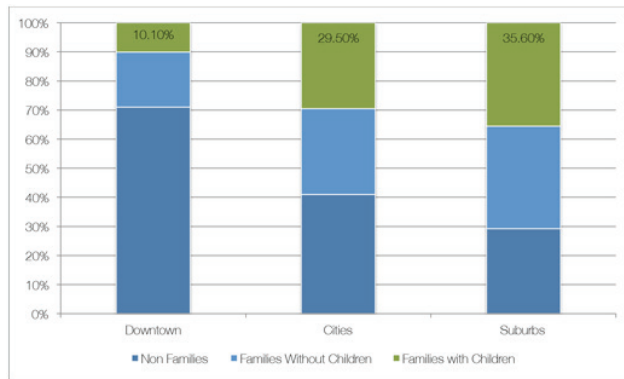


Figure 1.4 - Source: "Who Lives Downtown" - Eugenie L. Birch, 2005

Urbanized areas have been left with a disproportionately low number of residents who are families and children. Disregarding children altogether, urbanized areas were at a disadvantage in regards to family households as seen in figure 1.4, where households with families formed just over 10% of downtown households (Birch, 2005). In general, urbanized areas, particularly downtowns, were and are not perceived as places for households with any form of familial structure that incorporated children and even marriage, further perpetuating the image that the city was for single urban pioneers. As such cities have done everything they can to capture these small demographic groups and maintaining their happiness while assuming that families with children were a lost cause. In the years since the *Who Lives Downtown?* study, cities have seen an additional 7% loss in married couples with children living in urban cores and only modest gains in other familial structured households (Frey, et al., 2010). Suburbs have seen growth rates that range from 1% to 17% for various family household compositions, including married couples with children, married couples, and other family structures with and without children (Frey, et al., 2010). Despite the downward trend in births, suburbs continue to be the primary destination for families with and without children.

Our transformed landscape has given families little alternatives to living in the suburbs. Our built

environment, including the most essential elements for families such as quality schools and recreation, are almost exclusively accessible via automobile. Moderate-income households have been priced out and sized out of urban centers, and nearly all subsidies benefit, support, and encourage suburban housing development exclusively. This has created an extreme imbalance in the age demographics of urban centers while providing a lack of alternatives, preventing families from having a choice in their lifestyle while creating consequences that show potential to creating a lasting impact.

### Downtown Population Change by Cohort

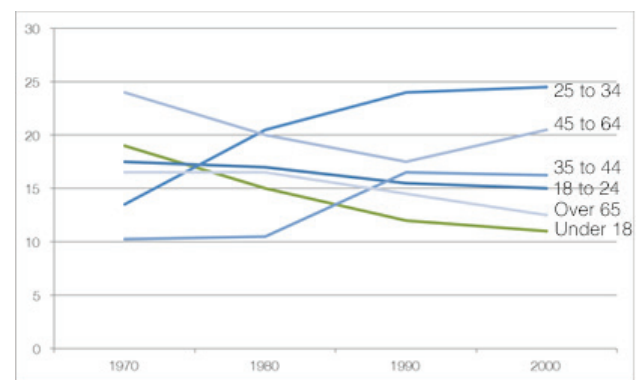


Figure 1.3 - Source: "Who Lives Downtown" - Eugenie L. Birch, 2005

## 1.2 - Why Should We Care?

Child birth rates have been on the decline since 2007, registering an 8.5% decline since 2007 (National Vital Statistics Reports, 2012). While not as low as the all time low of 1997, the years of 2007 through 2010 represent a shift from the increasing birth rate seen between 1998 and 2006 (National Vital Statistics Reports, 2012). Many have attributed this decline to the economy and the decision of couples to postpone having children, while others are insisting that this is a long-term trend based upon a variety of cultural factors. Young professionals postponing families where they only have one child, and more women opting for professional careers over childbirth support the theory that overall childbirths will remain lower. Regardless, these statistics do not represent the end of child births in this country, and the lower volume of children being

born only stresses the importance of being able to do all that we can to support and provide the best environment possible. This may mean contracted population growth and the shift of demographic living preferences, but contracted growth does not represent the end of childbirths. While we may never return to reproduction in the age of baby boomers we should also not expect our future society to appear similar to that of the film *Children of Men*. There are still millions of Americans that do choose to have children and the consistent wave of immigrants will ensure that children will remain an important fixture in our society. This has been proven by the immigration rate of children over the last three decades. From 1990 to 2007 immigrant children made up 77% of the increase in children in America (Fortuny & Chaudry, 2009). Even if they represent a lesser quantity than generations before, children serve as the future of our society, and 20% of our population is still a significant number deserving of representation and consideration. The success of today's and future children equates to the generations prior and afterwards success and should be protected and provided for regardless of their number. Their voices in societal concerns already exist in a limited form within policy and planning. Further limiting their consideration as we reconfigure our metropolitan regions, and predetermining their living environment may prove to be damaging in a multitude of ways.

Many would argue that the isolation of families in suburban environments is not a bad thing. But an excess of data would argue otherwise. Issues ranging from health, economic stability, education, crime and safety have all been compromised. While for years researchers, and particularly advocates of less concentrated forms of living have blamed an array of other factors, only recently have we begun to look at our physical environment as the cause of many of our problems. Our inefficient method

of living and growth has presented challenges few chose to predict, but appear more obvious when given greater consideration. The needs of families and children are not exclusive to them. Nearly every element that makes for a family friendly and child friendly environment is desirable to every age cohort from the 20 something college graduate to the empty nester retirees. While micro apartments may be trendy and exciting now, those same residents as they age, are going to want additional amenities and options that are not provided in such an environment.

There have also been concerns that the recent trends in millennials residing in urban centers may be a temporary blip caused by the economic recession, and that the natural order of civilization will pull these residents to suburban developments as they age, marry, and have children, a theory strongly supported by Joel Kotkin. While there could be some validity to that argument it is unlikely the primary cause. This reasoning is primarily rooted in the inability of those to be able to sell residential properties and make the traditional move to the suburbs or those still living with parents. Most urban centers have large concentrations of renters, particularly amongst millennials. Despite the recession of the late 2000's many were not holding properties that they couldn't sell. Additionally urban properties retained their value better than other forms of housing and proved to remain in high demand despite the recession. A report released by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) demonstrated how properties near transit, typically more urban in context, in five different cities outperformed suburban properties. Across all five cities (Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis, Phoenix, and San Francisco) transit oriented housing prices outperformed suburban housing by over 41 percent (The Center for Neighborhood Technology, 2013). The performance of housing in Phoenix was particularly telling in the trend of urban versus suburban housing, and single

family housing versus urban multi-family housing. Single-family homes that were near to mass transit fell by 20 percent while multi-family dwellings in more urban environments increased by 30 percent (The Center for Neighborhood Technology, 2013). While this study was not entirely indicative of urban versus suburban real estate, the proximity to transit, which is typically more urban; particularly in the cities studied, is suggestive in the demand and preference for urban housing. Furthermore, the study was conducted during the most volatile period in recent history for American real estate, 2006 to 2011, demonstrating the strength of urban and transit oriented housing properties.

Given the data on declining birth rates many may question why we should be accommodating and working extensively to satisfy another style of living for a declining household type. A study conducted by American Public Transit Association also shows a different picture than one might expect for the millennial generation. Studying five cities, Boston, San Francisco, Austin, Boulder, and Minneapolis of those between 18 and 24 APTA found that 19% of parents of children under the age of 18 live in the immediate downtown with another 21% living near downtown (APTA, 2013). Additionally 42% of those surveyed with children and another 36% without children agreed with the statement "Having a family doesn't mean you have to move out of the city." (APTA, 2013). This study was unique as it included two major urbanized cities; Boston and San Francisco, an emerging urban area; Minneapolis, and two other cities not necessarily associated with great urbanism; Austin and Boulder. This demonstrates the appeal of living in an urbanized core or downtown across a broad range of city types, and of a substantial percentage of residents.

### **1.2.1 - Health**

We have developed into a nation that is depressingly

overweight, one that poses a significant risk with an extensive list of health consequences such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. For years it was blamed on diet, that as Americans we consumed too much food or too much of the wrong food. The inundation of growth hormones and high fructose corn syrup coupled with the explosive growth in fast food restaurants were considered the primary culprits. We hardly took a moment to consider that our constant shuffling between locations via automobile, and less with strenuous physical activity, may be a significant factor. In 1991 no states had an obesity rate above twenty percent (Trust for America's Health, 2013). As of 2013, no states were below 20% obesity and 41 states had obesity rates over 25% (Trust for America's Health, 2013). While this represents a doubling of the obesity rate of adults since 1980, childhood obesity has tripled (Trust for America's Health, 2013). Of the 13 states that had obesity rates over 30%, 11 of the states could be considered largely rural or suburban in their physical environment, as shown in Figure 1.5. Undoubtedly our eating habits and sedentary habit of television and other electronic media forms have played a role, but what was once an excellent form of natural and passive exercise, walking has been all but eliminated from our daily routines. School aged children previously walked to school at a rate of 50% in the 1960's but that number has plummeted to under 15% by 2004 (Peirce, 2009). Furthermore children being driven to school increased from 12% to 44% in that same period (Peirce, 2009). These staggering increases in obesity cannot fully be blamed on suburban sprawl, or children no longer walking to school, but it would be foolish to ignore its role in the reduction of daily exercise for both adults and children. According to the 2007 National Survey of Children's Health 7 of the 10 states with the highest rates of childhood obesity amongst 10 to 17 year olds are located in the south, primarily suburban and rural communities (National Center



for Health Statistics, 2007). Nationally the rates of “severe obesity” amongst children have exploded from 1.4% thirty years ago to over 6% as of 2013 (Trust for America’s Health, 2013). These rapidly increasing rates of obesity have led to the estimate that one third of children born after 2000 will be eventual diabetics (Speck, 2012).

#### *Obesity Rate by State*

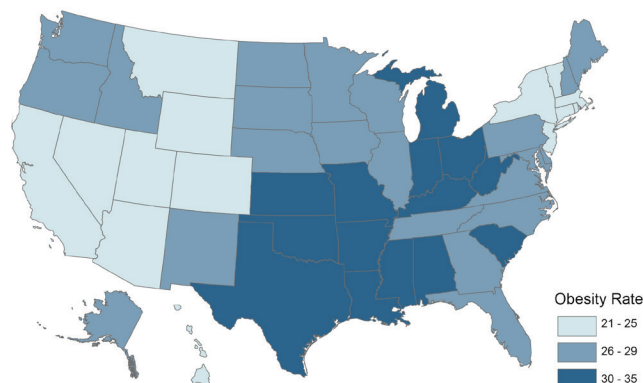


Figure 1.5 - Source: Trust for America’s Health - 2012

Again this is not to say that our method of living can be considered the primary factor in the rise of obesity in our country, but it is clearly a contributing one. The advent of television, computers, video games and other personal electronic devices has undoubtedly had an impact on the rate of physical activity particularly amongst children, but the immobility that is brought upon by the regular commuting and traveling executed almost entirely by personal automobile further eliminates opportunities for physical activity. Weight gain and loss can be simply summed by the amount of calories one intakes versus how many are burned. While we may have increased our intake through less healthy foods and sedentary behavior facilitated by new means of recreation, we have declined in the number of opportunities to burn those additional calories through limited walking from an individual perspective and by making it extremely difficult to do so from a community infrastructure perspective. In a study of Atlanta neighborhoods it was found that obesity declined by as much as 10% when density increased (Speck, 2012). This further demonstrates

that by increasing the opportunities for walking, primarily through density in the study executed, people will inherently choose to walk. Additionally, a more comprehensive study that considered over 400,000 residents in 448 counties in the United States found that the greater the amount of sprawl within a community the higher the prevalence of hypertension, body weight, and obesity (Frumkin, Frank, & Jackson, 2004).

Recent studies have indicated that the study conducted in Atlanta neighborhoods by Frumkin et. al. is consistent with other health related benefits to urban living and walkability. New York, a city widely regarded as the most urban in America, has seen dramatic increases in life expectancy that correlate with the city’s resurgence following its decline of the 1970’s. In 1990, what some consider being the closing years of New York’s demise; life expectancy trailed the national average by three years (Alcorn, 2012). As of 2012, the life expectancy was eight years greater than in 1990 and had surpassed the national average by nearly two years, with Manhattan leading by nearly four (Alcorn, 2012). Many have attributed the decline in crime and murder rates and the longer life expectancy of those with AIDS and HIV as the primary factors as well as increase in wealth. The decade between 1990 and 2000 were crucial for both of these contributing factors as New York became significantly safer and advances in medical treatment extended the life expectancy of those with AIDS and HIV. But following 2000 the increase in life expectancy increased with little interruption. For the increase post 2000, 60% of the extended life expectancy can be attributed to the reduction in heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and strokes (Alcorn, 2012). Many of these afflictions can be directly related to physical activity, such as walking and lifestyle habits that often differ between urban and suburban. It is no secret that majorities of New Yorkers spend their time either walking or walking

to transit when in transportation. While New York pursued many initiatives that had an effect on public health such as higher cigarette taxes, campaigns to highlight the effects of diabetes, and improved school lunches, New York had also emerged as a walker's paradise. This simple activity that most residents take part in every day may be potentially having a profound effect on New York's health. In a study by Besser and Dannenburg they found that many transit users achieved their recommended daily and weekly amounts of physical activity and exercise simply through their commutes (Besser & Dannenburg, 2005). On average transit users spent 19 minutes per day walking, and those that live in high-density urbanized areas were the most likely to achieve 30 minutes of exercise each day through walking (Besser & Dannenburg, 2005). The recommendations from the surgeon general suggest that adults should achieve 30 minutes of physical activity per day, and through their research Besser and Bannenburg found that 29% of their respondents were able to meet this requirement strictly through their usage of transit (Besser & Dannenburg, 2005).

While more urban cities inherently provide a greater opportunity for walking, which can lead to more opportunities for exercise, there is a direct correlation between living environment and time for activity and leisure recreational opportunities. A study presented by Frumkin et al. demonstrates that those in neighborhoods with low walkability average greater than 60 minutes less of moderate physical activity than those in highly walkable communities (Frumkin, Frank, & Jackson, 2004). Authors such as Leah Gallagher (*The End of Suburbia*) and Charles Montgomery (*Happy City*) have hypothesized that this loss of recreational time can be attributed to longer commute times, and the additional time spent mobilizing between services and needs such as school and daily services and errands.

Obesity is only one element of the health consequences that can be brought upon by the suburban built environment. Studies have begun to enter the discourse on place and its effect on well being that suggest that there are multiple negative mental consequences to living a more isolated and suburban life. In May of 2013 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued statistics regarding suicide rates for 35-64 year olds per state from 1999 to 2010. The states with the largest increases in suicide were as follows: Wyoming, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Hawaii, Vermont, Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Oregon, and South Dakota (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). An unscientific analysis would show that these states are largely rural and suburban states. Many of which would also dispel individual theories relating to issues of weather, economy, or stress. As Richard Florida observed in his follow up analysis more urban states that represented what many perceive to be high stress locations (Ex. New York and California), states with struggling economies (Ex. Michigan) and states with more unfavorable weather (Ex. Illinois and Washington) were not to be found in those that saw the largest increases in suicide (Florida, 2013). A similar study by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control found that the suicide rates of Alaska, Montana, and Wyoming ranged between 19.73 and 22.09 deaths per 100,000 while Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York ranged between 6.69 and 7.62. (Glaeser, 2011). Suicide rates among teens have also been found to have a correlation with population density, and potentially the most profound. In a recent study there was a strong correlation in suicide rates for those that are between the ages of 15 and 19 and a decrease in population density, particularly when density falls below 300 residents per square mile (Jaffe, 2013). This correlation was found in every state, and much like the findings presented by Glaeser, teen suicide rates were highest in states such as Arizona and

Utah, and lowest in states such as New York and New Jersey (Jaffe, 2013). Figure 1.6 shows the plot relationship of suicides to population density. Similar to the issue of obesity it is hard to single out suburban modes of living as the culprit to increased suicide. But when taken into account with larger studies regarding happiness, feelings of isolation, and loneliness, suburban living could reasonably be considered a substantial contributing factor to mental health.

*Suicide Rate in Relationship to Population Density*

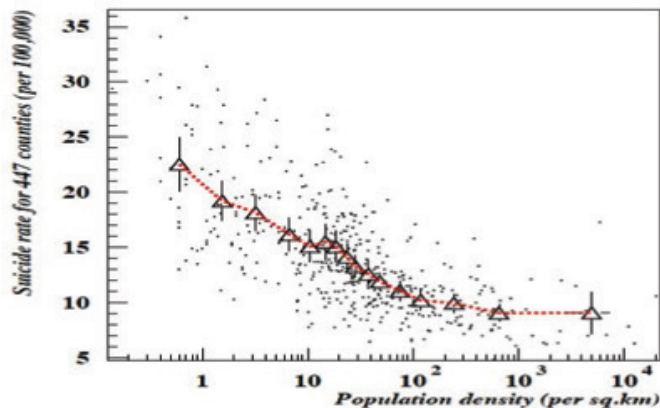


Figure 1.6 - Source: "The Unsettling Link Between Sprawl and Suicide" Eric Jaffe - 2013

Increased suicide rates can be indicative to other mental health issues, primarily stress. It comes as no surprise that commuting causes stress. The act of driving, when disregarding the effects of traffic congestion or other impediments, causes an elevated heart rate, increased anxiety and increased agitation, all of which have negative impacts on mental health (Frumkin, Frank, & Jackson, 2004). A study in the city of Toronto that focused on city drivers found that when impediments were factored into commuting, drivers self-reported increased feelings of frustration, uneasiness, and temperament (Frumkin, Frank, & Jackson, 2004). These feelings are already compounded with the natural response to driving without impediments. Unfortunately these feelings do not remain in the automobile when drivers finish commuting. A simple Internet search for the term "road rage" will produce scores of recent news events that resulted in injury or death as

a direct result of the responses some drivers make to the stress associated with commuting. While this external release of frustration and anger is often isolated it is representative to how the stresses of commuting, a result of suburban living, can begin to affect other elements in life beyond the confines of the automobile. It has been studied and reported that driving affects employment and satisfaction based on commute time and difficulty, but there is minimal work on its effects on home and the family relationship. With two working parents, the time for extra curricular activities for children is compromised from commuting, and the addition of other family related activities such as sports and after school activities only add to the commuting strain of parents (Frumkin, Frank, & Jackson, 2004). As highlighted by Claire Freeman in her assessment of the damages that our current methods of transportation on children cause, there is a significant loss of time at home as parents often have to adjust and stagger the times they leave and return based on the commuting chaos (Freeman, 2006). This has led to a loss of time at home with children as many parents have to leave earlier and return later to either avoid traffic chaos or accommodate for it (Freeman, 2006). This compromising of time and its effects were given a dramatic face in Charles Montgomery's book *The Happy City*. Montgomery profiles a family in Stockton, California where the father departed for his job at 4:15 a.m. to beat traffic in, and would not return home until 7:30 given the chaos of rush hour traffic, while profiling the many frustrations that this caused personally and its effects at home (Montgomery, 2013). The Strausser family's situation may have been extreme, as the father often attributed their suburban lifestyle as a factor to his divorce and the eventual challenges his children faced, but is supported by the Swedish study that found that people who endure commutes greater than 45 minutes were 40 percent more likely to divorce (Montgomery, 2013).

For children, the years following ages 4 to 5 are some of the most crucial and formative years for development, particularly in regards to autonomy and individuality. The same way a family's eating habits can influence the physical health of their children; their environment critically shapes their mental health as well. While a subject that has not been significantly explored, parenting style, which is shaped by their living arrangement and environment, ultimately impacts the mental development of children. This topic has been explored on the surface by examining restrictions on children in regards to mobility and rules. For a suburban environment a child having to be transported via car by their parents at all times limits their individual autonomy and the range of their surrounding environment (Sipe, Buchanan, & Dodson, 2006). By restricting children to transportation via automobile the fear is that the loss of unstructured and informal play space is damaging to the imagination and creativity of children that is often developed through unstructured play (Sipe, Buchanan, & Dodson, 2006). For urban environments the fear of letting a child alone due to crime or perceptions of safety produce potentially identical results (Sipe, Buchanan, & Dodson, 2006). Because of the crime perception from parents and the separation of uses, there has become little opportunity for children to have their own dedicated and accessible space for play and gathering. Paul Tranter refers to this as parents falling into a 'social trap' (Tranter, 2006). The opportunity for a child to explore their own neighborhood develops the foundation as to how they perceive their surrounding environment and has been well studied (Tranter, 2006). If parents fall into the 'social trap' of perceiving their neighborhood to be unsafe, the way many urban neighborhoods often are, they are removing opportunities for their children to develop social skills and emotions that are necessary through real world interaction and involvement, typically only available in their immediate surrounding environment

(Tranter, 2006). This 'social trap' exists despite statistical evidence that cities are significantly safer than suburban communities. As acknowledged by Tranter and prior research, a child develops a sense of place through experiences in their own community, which is essential for a child to understand and feel comfortable in the environment that they ultimately use on a regular basis (Tranter, 2006). While a similar study has not been completed in the United States, a study from Melbourne, Australia children found that of the average of 23.1 trips taken per week by children, 71% were by automobile while 23% percent were taken by walking or bicycle (Whitzman & Mizrachi, 2012). With interaction limited by automobile, in a country that is compositionally very similar to the United States, opportunities for engagement, exploration, and understanding of their community is highly limited, a likely result to be found in the United States.

In these types of environments, where children are dependent on being chauffeured around, they lack the autonomy that adults have in gyms and social spaces, to independently pursue spaces that may provide individual activity, play, and socializing (Frumkin, Frank, & Jackson, 2004). To compensate for this autonomy parents often over-schedule their children for activities, which ultimately require them to be driven by parents as well (Tranter, 2006). As part of the social trap, parents, who in research conducted by Tranter in Australia, acknowledge that their children are too frequently driven from location to location, feel pressure to continue to do so because other parents do as well (Tranter, 2006). This has resulted in an endless cycle. Parents, out of fear of safety that they recognize they contribute to, are unwilling to let their children independently explore the world, and with that greater dependence on the automobile for nearly every activity, communities are then planned to only accommodate those that drive.

## 1.2.2 - Finances

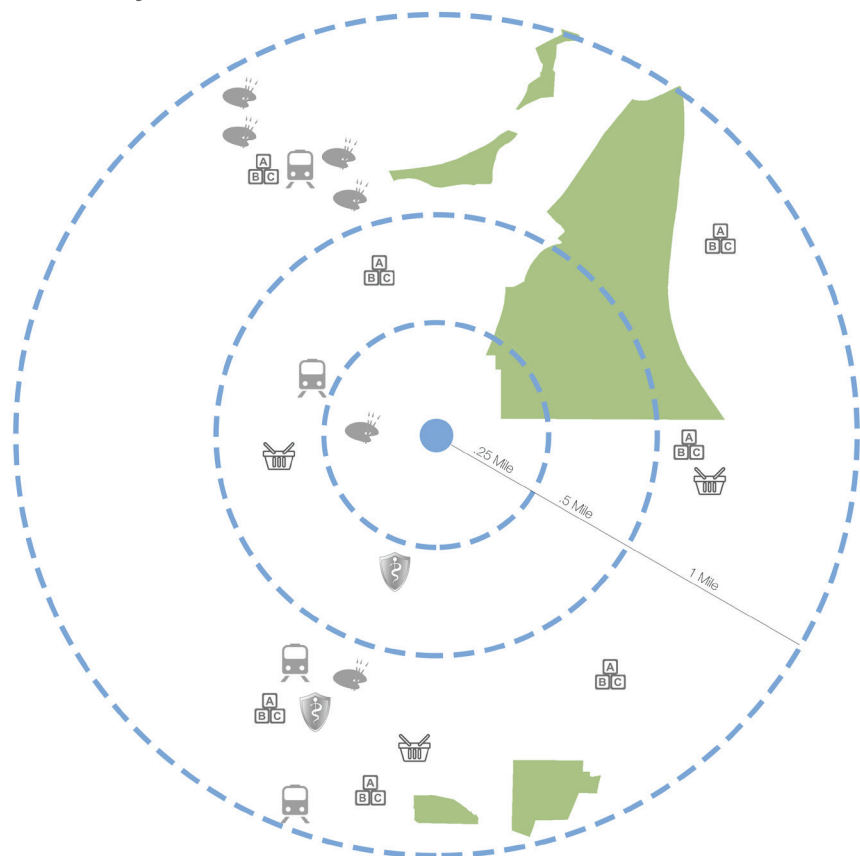
Many Americans, particularly families, see the suburbs as the only economically viable alternative. This perception is typically derived from the lower housing costs found in suburban communities, disregarding other financial obligations that rapidly reduce the cost effectiveness of moving away from the city center. Costs associated with individual commuting and the transporting of children begin to add and duplicate unnecessary costs for a household. In 2006 the Center for Housing Policy issued a report on the combined costs of housing and transportation, with a particular focus on working class families. The report found that cities such as Atlanta, Kansas City, and Tampa were spending more than 30% of their income on transportation, often exceeding the cost of housing (Lipman, 2006). While cities such as New York, San Francisco, and Seattle had higher costs associated with housing, critics such as Christopher Leinberger will point to a greater economic strength in families that put more money into a historically appreciable asset such as housing, versus an asset that is guaranteed to depreciate (Leinberger, 2009). The Center for Neighborhood Technology also found that there is a diminishing return on the distance from employment in the trade off of housing and transportation costs. While housing costs may decline as one moves further out, it was found that once a commuter reaches twelve to fifteen miles from employment the savings are no longer present, and the money not spent on housing is then spent on transportation (Lipman, 2006). In cities such as Atlanta where Gwinnett and Cobb County suburbs are highly popular suburban communities, commutes average greater than 17 miles (Clean Air Campaign, 2013). While many believe that the "Drive Till You Qualify" is an excellent strategy to save money on housing, a perceived fluctuating cost, that money is lost in transportation, a perceived fixed cost.

In addition to the increased costs of automobile ownership in suburban communities, there are additional inefficiencies that can affect a family's budget. Given the dispersed nature of suburban communities with relatively little to no walkability, the dependency of using an automobile for each trip can be further taking. While most urban neighborhoods have a wealth of services families use regularly, such as grocery stores, schools, medical facilities, and cultural resources, within easy walkability, suburban communities do not have this luxury. Most services are located over one mile from many subdivisions, and lacking a direct or safe route for walkability or other modes of transportation that do not depend on an automobile. As such, a families budget in relationship to time and fuel is compromised as even the most simple of trips to acquire a loaf of bread or visit to a park requires the use and expenditure of an automobile. As shown in Figure 1.7, a multitude of services that are of frequent use by a family can be found within a short walking distance in Midtown Atlanta, while these same services are located well beyond walking distance in a community such as Kennesaw, Georgia.

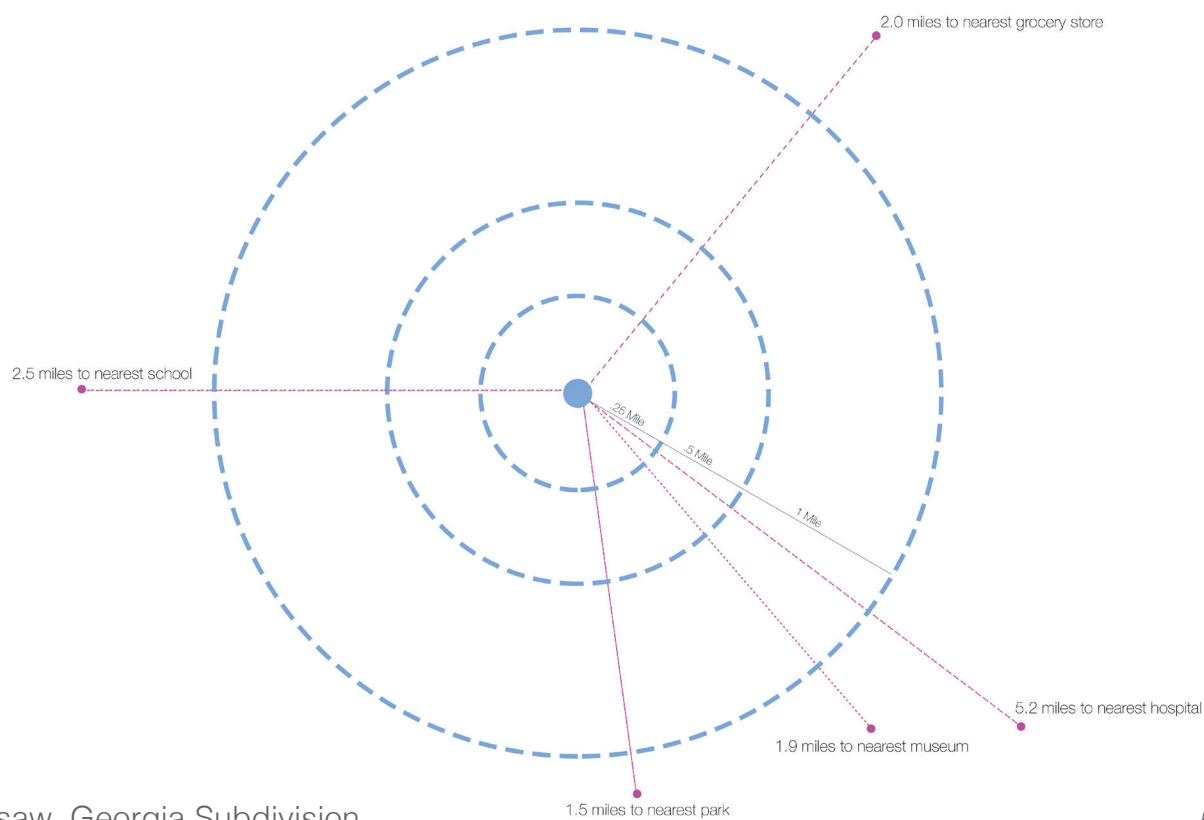
Some advocate that the absence of families, and particularly children within a city is not necessarily a bad thing. The cost to provide services, primarily schools, to families can be a burden for cities. We will not attempt to argue the morality of attempting to avoid this service and expenditure, but there is sufficient evidence that by doing so cities create more harm than benefit. While schools can represent a significant expense for a city, it is significantly less than the expenditures or concessions made for other demographic groups. As highlighted by research conducted by Mildred Warner and Rebecca Baran-Rees many cities and communities find themselves losing revenue opportunities by providing concessions to groups such as young professionals and the elderly (Warner & Baran-Rees, 2012). This



Comparison of Proximity of Services



Midtown Atlanta



Kennesaw, Georgia Subdivision

Figure 1.7

may appear to be a benefit for municipalities as young professionals and the elderly do not require services such as education, but families with children tend to outspend young professionals. Annually the average family with children will spend \$15,046 more than 25-34 years olds and \$18,787 than 65-75 year olds (Warner & Baran-Rees, 2012). Furthermore, families and households headed by those 35-64 that are earning and spending more than other demographics, spend 77% of their expenditures on children in the local economy, boosting local tax revenue and supporting a multitude of other tax revenue sources (Warner & Baran-Rees, 2012). This represents a strong economic base, one that tends to increase economic output and growth, rather than decreasing similar to that of the elderly population, one of which often receives some of the largest concessions. It is not to say that investing in the elderly is a poor decision, but to do so at the expense of a city's future is not a formula conducive to economic growth and prosperity. As highlighted by Warner and Baran-Rees there is a correlation between the declining workforce and the aging population, and by not investing in the younger population to replace those members of society is a poor economic formula for sustainability, let alone economic growth (Warner & Baran-Rees, 2012).

The costs associated with low density, single use sprawl have been well documented. From Myron Orfield's discussion on its promotion of detrimental inter-regional competition, to the Sierra Club's report on the real cost to our cities and environment, there is substantial evidence proving that sprawl is damaging to a city and a region's finances. In 2012 Joseph Minicozzi of Urban 3 in Asheville, North Carolina, analyzed the revenue generating aspects of a single use parcel versus a mixed-use parcel in Asheville, North Carolina. He initially presented the difference between a Wal-Mart parcel and a mixed-use downtown building and how it compared

on tax revenue per acre as well as employees and residents. The six story mixed-use building occupied 1/170th the site as the Wal-Mart while producing \$634,000 in tax revenue per acre versus the Wal-Mart's \$6,500 per acre along with its higher retail tax revenue (Minicozzi, 2012). Furthermore, the mixed-use site produced 90 residents per acre to the Wal-Mart's 0 and also producing nearly 74 jobs per acre compared to the Wal-Mart's 6 (Minicozzi, 2012). Both of which contribute to increases in property and sales tax revenue. This disparity of tax revenue transcends to traditional suburban single-family development. As seen in Figure 1.8, a single-family property produces only \$3.70 of tax revenue for every \$415.00 of tax revenue generated by a six story mixed-use building (Minicozzi, 2012).

When considering the research executed by Warner and Baran-Rees, providing services and housing for families compounds the local revenue opportunities for cities by capturing their increased income as well as their more efficient method of living. These enormous missed opportunities for tax revenue collection affect all residents, but even more so

#### *Efficiency of Higher Density - Mixed Use Development*

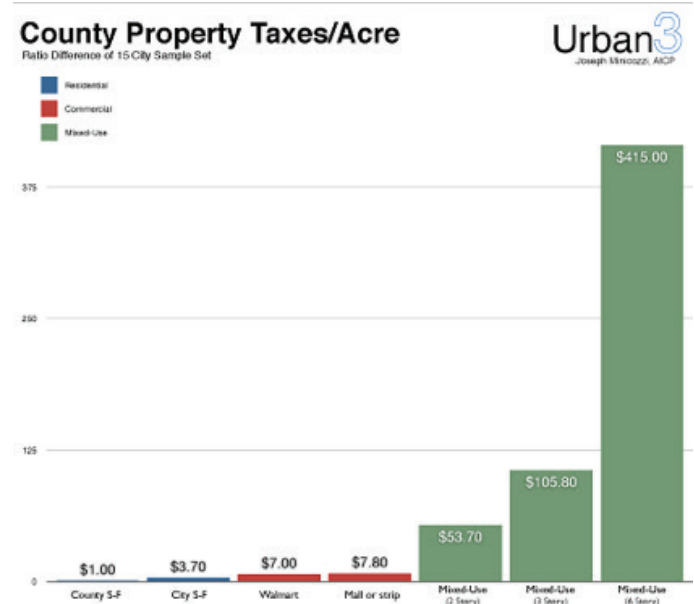


Figure 1.8 - Economic Efficiency of Mixed-Use Buildings (Source: Urban 3)

in regards to families and its effect on education. A secondary gap that is in desperate need of reduction is the bussing of students to school. This inefficient use of school resources is a direct result of low density development. During the 2005-2006 school year schools spent nearly \$19 billion bussing 25 million students to school (Montgomery, 2013).

### 1.2.3 - Diversity

The idea of urban diversity is broad. From the economic and racial demographics to the urban fabric, urbanized centers provide a wealth of opportunities and engagement that is highly diverse. Unfortunately through suburban sprawl we have separated ourselves racially, ethnically, and socio-economically at greater rates in the past thirty years (Montgomery, 2013). While many point to the years of white flight as the period where citizens separated themselves from those that were racially different, the problem has become even more profound than merely race. While the race gap has begun to close in large part to the housing market collapse of the late 2000's creating affordability for minorities and immigrants, suburbs segregate themselves beyond race. Suburban subdivisions have not only segregated and isolated the poor and the wealthy from one another; they have found new ways to divide middle class segments. Subdivisions now are composed of target priced housing. Subdivision A may have been built with \$100,000 to \$150,000 starter homes while subdivision B was built with \$250,000 to \$300,000 homes (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & Speck, 2000). Neighborhoods that previously represented a smattering of home prices, while generally not extreme, still afforded a mixture of prices and sizes, refraining from classifying and isolating people from one another based on minor differences in home prices or types (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & Speck, 2000). What has compounded this problem is that a few blocks do not separate these houses from one another any longer. They are each their own

independent pods, independent overgrown cul-de-sacs that are isolated from one another limiting interaction of citizens with minute differences in socio-economic class (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & Speck, 2000). In Andres Duany's *Suburban Nation* the authors discussed how this type of living equates to a homogeneous environment where residents, and particularly children of whom he refers to as Cul-De-Sac Kids, are sheltered from those who may be different from them, potentially making them "ill prepared to live in a diverse society" (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & Speck, 2000). We no longer separate between wealthy, middle, and poorer classes. The middle class has developed its own hierarchy structure of class, segregated by small differences in housing price. Duany goes on to describe how this separation inhibits a child from learning empathy or understanding for those that may not be like them, potentially leading to greater problems as one ages (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & Speck, 2000). This is highly supportive of Paul Tranter's research where children lack the ability to understand and develop emotional connections with their surrounding environment and those around them. As described by Freeman a child cannot learn about society "within the confines of the family, the school, the playground, or youth club" (Freeman, 2006). A child's desire to learn about their environment can be demonstrated in the research presented by Freeman where Wheway and Millward examined the usage of front and back gardens in the United Kingdom (yards in the United States). Through their research they found that the use of back gardens paled against the usage of front yards and that the area within the surrounding two blocks of their front door was one of the most important learning experiences for children (Freeman, 2006). By providing a diverse and eclectic surrounding it gave the children the opportunity to have access and to understand the greater society that surrounded them (Freeman, 2006). Cul-de-sacs of like-minded residents that



are nearly identical in economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds provide little opportunity for this type of understanding and learning.

While its impact may not be immediately measurable, a city's focus on targeted gentrification may prove to be damaging as well. Much like the "hysterection zoning" cited by Gordon in St. Louis, cities have focused on the recruitment of young professionals, college students, and to a more limited extent, retirees. As noted previously research by Peter Hall has shown that a serious imbalance in the demographics and population have occurred in center cities (Horschelmann & Blerk, 2012). The focus on providing for these preferred demographics have further compromised compact spaces, streets, and other urban landscapes while giving little consideration for the provision of children (Horschelmann & Blerk, 2012). The accommodation and provision made for college students can be further compromising to revitalization and establishing a sense of permanence to an urban environment. While schools such as Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia have assisted in reestablishing activity in the downtown urban core, questions remain regarding the long-term impact. As discussed by Horschelmann and van Blerk, research has found that the heavy concentration of college and university students in an urban core can create "youth ghettos" (Horschelmann & Blerk, 2012). With limited economic power and their temporary residence it can create a sense of transience rather than permanence which is, not conducive to long term investment within a community (Horschelmann & Blerk, 2012). While they may prove to be long term residents following their academic completion, the area is immediately compromised for those outside of the targeted demographic as businesses and services are established to cater to only them and not a more broad population range.

In Austin, Texas a 2013 report has specifically attributed the impact of the University of Texas and its student residences, referred to as High Occupancy Units (HOU) as the primary driving force behind the demographic change of Central Austin (Central Austin Community Development Corporation, 2013). The report, created by the Central Austin Community Development Corporation (CACDC) cites the renting of larger homes, duplexes, and other units to multiple college students and its negative impact on the total number of owner-occupants and their disinvestment in the community, the weakening of public education, its impacts on rental rates, and its ultimate displacement of existing residents (Central Austin Community Development Corporation, 2013). Furthermore, the report criticizes the newly developing HOU's as diminishing the diversity of the existing housing stock. Like many older urban communities, those of concern in Austin are a healthy mix of higher density apartment blocks and condos, as well as attached townhomes, and small lot single-family residences. Maintaining this diversity can be essential. Housing units such as duplexes and townhomes can typically average 30 dwelling units per acre, a density high enough to support mass transit rail lines, and adequately sufficient to be a part of a dense urban core. They also represent an alternative housing option for growing families that do not require high-rise condominium buildings, and allow residents to transition varying housing sizes based on needs. In cases such as Austin, these homes are being lost to multiple college students renting them out, and effectively turning a diverse community into a "town and gown" community. For cities with major educational institutions within their urban core; such as Pittsburgh, Boston, and Atlanta. This can translate to the compromising of once diverse urban communities into the aforementioned "youth ghettos."

While much of the critique on diversity is anecdotal

or motivated through issues of equity and morality, there has become emerging evidence that diversity, particularly amongst children, has positive effects on development. A joint research project by the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) and the University of Groningen, the Netherlands, found that middle school children with a greater amount of friends that differed from their own ethnic background felt safer (Mandell, 2013). This is particularly important for middle school ages as this is a critical time for children that are going through many changes and attempting to establish their own identity. The study focused on urban middle schools and found that there was no one ethnic group that experienced or had a greater impact on the safer and less vulnerable feeling relationships, and that all demographics had the ability to create more safe and less vulnerable relationships with one another (Mandell, 2013). While gentrification has become a concern for urban cores, there is a greater opportunity for diversity, particularly in school districts than can be found in the more homogeneous suburban communities.

#### **1.2.4 - Safety**

Much is made about the safety of cities and the perceived tranquility of suburban communities. Many people still have the perceived image of excessive crime and a multitude of dangers that threatened most major American cities in the latter decades of the 20th century. While these cities may still pose an elevated threat from murder and drugs, they are not problems that are exclusive to major cities, and are not more menacing than the multitude of safety issues presented by the lifestyle of suburban communities. A recent study conducted between 1999 and 2006 found that the opportunity for injury or death through accidents and crime increases by 22% in suburban and rural communities versus urban communities (Myers, et al., 2013). Myers, et al. also found that death from unintentional injury, such

as car crashes, was 15 times higher than the risk for homicide (Myers, et al., 2013). Due to the walkability and access to transit, the rate for automobile related deaths was significantly lower as well. For suburban and rural residents automobile related deaths were 27.61 for every 100,000 people, while for urban residents the rate was less than half at 10.58 for every 100,000 people (Myers, et al., 2013).

Perception of crime is possibly the greatest challenge of downtowns and urbanized areas. While there are few resources demonstrating the perception of crime in urbanized areas versus suburban areas, the belief that crime is rising is commonly held. In a 2011 Gallup survey, 68% of citizens believe that crime has increased nationally and 48% believe that it has increased locally, not discerning between urbanized and suburban areas (Saad, 2011). This perception is despite a 40% decline in crime between 2001 and 2009 after having dropped to less than half of its rate in 1994 (Saad, 2011). This type of perception, which is significantly higher towards urbanized areas, has led to several cities such as Minneapolis, Seattle, Tacoma, Cincinnati, and countless others to go on a public relations charge to counteract these perceptions. As referenced by Tranter and Freeman this perception can lead to 'social traps,' where parents concerned of what others may think of them will ultimately follow the group based on perceptions. This was further reinforced by Whitman's and Mizrahi's analysis where the most cited reasons for limiting a child's travel choice are traffic danger and the perception of poor maintenance of public spaces and buildings that create an image of a criminal or threatening element (Whitman & Mizrahi, 2012). Additionally, the 'social trap' and perceptions of safety still limit those parents who are willing to live with children in an urban core. The same Melbourne study found that the mobility of urban children versus suburban children was the same, where only 17% of trips were

executed without an accompanying adult (Whitzman & Mizrahi, 2012).

### 1.2.4 - The Opposition

The sentiment that suburbs can be damaging and cities are the cure is not one shared by all. Some, including author and blogger Mike Lanza, decry a war on suburbs and children over the reinvestment in our cities and the critique of the suburbs. Lanza's primary critique is that by hating the suburbs one inherently hates children. Lanza does not believe that urban living is viable for a family stating that "alternatives to suburbs in metropolitan areas, cities, are much worse for children" (Lanza, 2013). Without evidence or prior study, Lanza decries that cities are clearly worse and that alternatives and options to suburb living should not be part of any agenda. While Lanza's critique that many school systems are inadequate and that the cost of living is too high may be correct, he uses these issues as a reason for families not to live in urban cores rather than considering opportunities for improvement. From this he proclaims that the only option is to improve suburban communities and that we should abandon any notion of improving urban communities to be more accommodating to families, further perpetuating the defiance of offering options for people to live. Lanza also misconstrues the attempt to make cities more accommodating for families as "suburb hating" and that being anti-suburb is anti-child (Lanza, 2013). This critique fails to recognize that the intent of to make cities more family friendly is not an assault on suburbs, no matter how damaging they may be, but an intent to provide options.

Other critiques such as Joel Kotkin may not agree that the city is no place for families, but may be misguided in what will attract them and what strikes the balance between urban and family friendly. In a 2013 article, Kotkin proclaims that a survey by the National Association of Realtors in 2011

showed that respondents preferred single-family homes at a rate of 80% (Kotkin, *The Childless City*, 2013). The following fall, the National Association of Realtors released their results from the same survey from 2013, demonstrating that Kotkin's claim had declined to 76% (National Association of Realtors, 2013). Preferences of living in an apartment or condominium increased by 6%, while the preference for an attached home such as a townhome remained flat (National Association of Realtors, 2013). To his credit, Kotkin's focus is that cities should do more to attract and retain families with children, but draws assumptions in regards to housing that have been refuted by the National Association of Realtors' survey and precedents such as Vancouver, as well as the increase in many large cities of their population under the age of five, in that multi-family homes are attractive and can be a suitable environment to raise a family.

According to the National Association of Realtors survey, 60% of respondents preferred a mix of houses and stores that are easy to walk to (National Association of Realtors, 2013). These are not the single use suburbs that Lanza envisions as the only acceptable place to raise a family. Kotkin also draws a direct correlation between density and children, and that a higher density community is not a welcome place for children, a view also shared by Lanza. Lanza suggests that cities such as Philadelphia, and their higher density deter families with children, despite children making up nearly 19% of Greater Center City Philadelphia. The 2013 survey also saw a small decrease in the percentage of respondents that prefer a single-family home and longer commute over a condominium or apartment (National Association of Realtors, 2013). Density and walkability go together, something that most understand and are willing to accept when they desire walkability. While the notion of having to raise a family in a suburban community may be

popular amongst those over the age of 40, it is a waning belief amongst millennials as shown in the previously mentioned APTA survey. The percentage of respondents that agreed with the statement that “Having a family doesn’t mean you have to move out of the city” (42% with children, 36% without) should also serve as an indicator to Lanza and Kotkin that opinions are changing.

Kotkin references Brooklyn as an alternative and example of increased density living for families, demonstrating that there are urban opportunities for family friendly communities. Kotkin tends to dilute the urbanity of Brooklyn, perceiving it as a more suburban area when compared to Manhattan. But when compared to many other cities across the country, the density of Brooklyn would rival that of many downtowns. At an average density of 35,369 residents per square mile it is denser than any census tract in Midtown or Downtown Atlanta, and the Downtowns of Seattle, Denver, and Minneapolis (United States Census Bureau). Brooklyn’s higher density works against Kotkin’s belief that density and children are not compatible. While Kotkin’s perception of the density and urbanity of Brooklyn may be skewed by that of Manhattan, Brooklyn represents an urban environment that is more dense and vibrant than many of our other rapidly growing major cities. His advocacy for urban neighborhoods more like Brooklyn is also inconsistent with his comparisons to cities such as Raleigh, North Carolina and Irvine, California, as family friendly locations, which are predominately suburban.

Despite Kotkin’s inconsistencies in what he defines as urban and what he perceives the living preferences of many to be, his overall critique is that cities are not doing enough to keep and attract families. Be it through housing, greenspace, or schools, Kotkin’s overarching critique is that for cities to remain successful and vital, economically and

culturally, they must attract those with children. And unlike Lanza, Kotkin is willing to see the potential for opportunity and that it is a worthy investment.

*“We need to walk, just as birds need to fly. We need to be around other people. We need beauty”*

– Enrique Penalosa –

## 2 - What Has Been Done?

### 2.1 - Vancouver, British Columbia

While not an American city there has hardly been any other North American city that has made a greater attempt at luring families and children with intent. Developments such as North False Creek have been specifically aimed at retaining residents downtown, particularly families, in the face of suburbanization. Long before North False Creek, Vancouver established the *Family Friendly / High-Density Housing Design Principles and Guidelines* in 1992. These guidelines, with the intent to "...address the key issues of site, building, and unit design which relate to residential livability for families with children" may have been the first established with the notion of preserving and creating housing for families in a modern city. The guidelines established many requirements that were aimed directly at establishing a community and providing the necessary amenities and elements that families need. To prevent the over saturation of studio and one bedroom units, the Vancouver guidelines require that at least a quarter of all developed units have a minimum of two bedrooms (Groc, 2007). The City of Vancouver was able to create this guideline, following research that found that most families determined that the number of bedrooms was more important to a family than the density of the housing. Furthermore, the city established a minimum number of family friendly housing units to be concentrated in a single development, in order to ensure that an adequate number are provided to create a development and community that establishes opportunities for multiple families to live. This limits opportunities for developers to exploit, and provide a minimal number of units that would create only isolated housing opportunities for families. This has led to what has now been referred to as the "Vancouver Model," where narrow towers rest upon a podium of mixed use and most often townhome housing units (Boddy, 2004). While this has been poorly imitated in places such as Dubai, it has begun to serve as

a model development style for cities such as San Francisco and Seattle while potentially serving as the true "New Urbanism" (Boddy, 2004). To ensure that the supporting amenities are provided that families need, Vancouver also requires that developments provide space for services such as parks and childcare facilities (Groc, 2007). Through their research the city was able to determine that the proximity of day cares, schools, shopping, transit, and design offered the greatest opportunities for mitigating what density concerns remained for many families. Additionally the province of British Columbia sets forth a multitude of building standards in multi-family units specifically for families.

North False Creek has proven that families will live in higher density communities such as Downtowns and their immediately adjacent neighborhoods as long as they are planned for. A former industrial center for the City of Vancouver, North False Creek was transformed into a mixed use development with the intent to create a community that was flexible and accommodating for all residents, particularly those with children (City of Vancouver, 1990). Using the *Family Friendly / High-Density Housing Design Principles and Guidelines*, North False Creek set out with the intention to ensure that 25% of the housing units followed these guidelines (City of Vancouver, 1990). Recognizing that creating an urban family friendly environment was not limited to housing options, provisions were included to provide a safe and secure environment while not sanitizing it of the rich and diverse elements that a city offers, providing the appropriate parks, schools, and childcare facilities, establishing safe areas for recreation and socializing (City of Vancouver, 1990). From a follow up study conducted by the University of British Columbia's School of Regional and Community Planning, it was found that many residents have been satisfied with the development, while offering



an insightful critique and lessons learned for other future projects. As of 2008, the development has been successful in establishing 13% of their residents as under the age of 19 (UBC School of Regional and Community Planning, 2008). Families with children have become a characteristic that many attribute to the community identity, creating a greater sense of strength in the community (UBC School of Regional and Community Planning, 2008). To meet the needs of families with children, a central principle to the original programming of the development, childcare services, a community center, and a school were incorporated.

The popularity of families with children calling North False Creek home has led to the unintended consequence of childcare facilities and the elementary school reaching and surpassing capacity (UBC School of Regional and Community Planning, 2008). This has created a problem typically not found in American cities, in that wait lists and overcrowding now poses the greatest threat to raising a family in urbanized Vancouver. Elements that received the greatest critique from families were related to park and recreational spaces and the overall design of the homes. While residents and families were pleased with the quality of the homes, many critiqued

the buildings and being too monotonous with little variation in exterior design (UBC School of Regional and Community Planning, 2008). Additionally, while the design standards required a significant amount of park space which was pleasing to most residents, those with children rated interior and exterior play spaces lower, while wanting more exterior space that was more suitable for older children and teens (UBC School of Regional and Community Planning, 2008). The overall satisfaction of the community has been a resounding success, with 96% of community residents being satisfied (UBC School of Regional and Community Planning, 2008).

The overarching question is whether the design standards and developments such as North False Creek have been successful in attracting families with children. Since 2001 the total population for those under 19 (versus 18 in the United States) has remained fairly consistent with a total growth of -.80% for the city as a whole. For the Downtown neighborhood, as defined by the Canadian Census, the growth has been 119.86% (Census Canada, 2011). This growth rate has not only far exceeded the city's growth rate of 10.60%, but has also exceeded the overall population growth rate for the downtown community of 95.39%. Overall the downtown community has seen tremendous growth in children of all ages. While those between the ages of 0 and 4 have represented the fastest growth rate (157.34%), the ages of 5 to 9 (116.05%), 10 to 14 (106.15%), and 15 to 19 (95.39%) have all grown as fast or faster than the downtown population as a whole. The growth rate of each cohort is compared to the city average in Figure 2.0. This demonstrates that the initiatives of the "Vancouver Model" and their commitment to retaining and growing families in their urban core have been highly successful.

*North False Creek - Vancouver, B.C.*



*Figure 1.9 Source: Gordon Price*

### Vancouver, B.C. - Under 19 Population Growth Rates

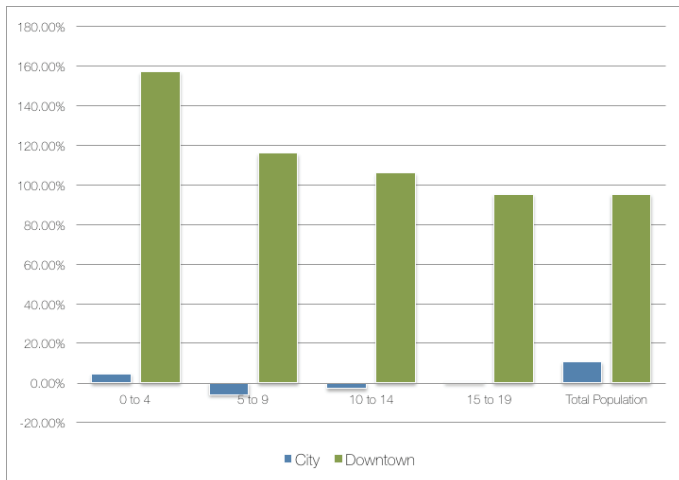


Figure 2.0 - Data Source: Census Canada

## 2.2 - Seattle, Washington

Much like its Pacific Northwest peer Vancouver, Seattle has turned a serious focus and effort to recruiting and keeping families in the urban core. In April of 2013 the local AIA chapter went as far as to present a forum on how to make downtown more family friendly in light of Seattle ranking as one of the worst cities for households with children living in the city. The AIA presentation included sessions on housing, active space, urban schools, and transportation. In response to a growing demand and recognizing the flight of families with children over the age of five, the City of Seattle opened its first downtown playground in early 2013 and is examining the feasibility of a downtown elementary school. The first downtown Seattle park opened in March of 2013, that replaced a paved plaza area that provided a handful of benches and trees (Blocker, 2013). This park is part of a two-year pilot program, which will hopefully see the addition of more park space (Blocker, 2013). Additionally, there is a children's park to open beneath the Space Needle expected in the summer of 2014, to replace a closed children's museum space (Blocker, 2013).

As the number of children, particularly those under the age of 5 have increased in Downtown Seattle,

there has become a major push to build a downtown school. A focus group identified that the primary reason for families with children under the age of 5 to leave downtown was the lack of public school resources (Downtown Seattle Association, 2012). This demand has come from increasing enrollment and the increase in the child population of Downtown Seattle. From 2007 to 2011 the number of children who lived downtown and attended a Seattle Public School increased by 21%, higher than the 10% increase citywide (Downtown Seattle Association, 2013). As a result an overwhelming percentage of residents approved a \$1.25 billion dollar tax levy, which include \$5 million for a downtown school (Downtown Seattle Association, 2013). In 2012 the Downtown Seattle Association assembled a report demonstrating the increased demand for public schools in the urban core, citing that the South Lake Union community, directly north of Downtown, experienced the fastest growth in public school enrollment (Downtown Seattle Association, 2012). Seattle has consistently ranked as a city with one of the lowest percentages of the population under 18, but since 2000 has seen an increase of 6.47% citywide.

While previous politicians and planners of the city, have acknowledged the declining presence of families and children in Seattle, it has only been recently that the city and its residents have become more active in working to craft solutions. The April 2013 AIA presentation focused on how to craft these solutions, understanding the dichotomy between the market and policy. This recent drive to establish a more family friendly downtown is still in its infancy, but with the collaboration between the City of Seattle, the Downtown Seattle Association, and the AIA, it is an initiative that has been gaining tangible traction, and less about theoretical conversation. The improvement in parks, as well as the consideration of the first downtown school since the 1940's has been



a direct result of the growth in children in the urban core, a growth that could also be a result of the city's renewed interest in providing for these families.

In 2014 the Seattle Planning Commission will unveil its Family-Sized Housing Agenda designed to address what Seattle has seen as the most important issue related to retaining and attracting families. The initiative is developed from the 2011 report that identified the scarcity of three bedroom units that were affordable to those earning the median income. Expanding on the downtown and urban core, the Seattle Planning Commission identified areas of frequent transit service and what they refer to as "Urban Villages" and "Urban Centers" (The Seattle Planning Commission, 2014). From this report, intended to further illuminate the issue of families in the city, they recommend a series of initiatives to stimulate the growth of housing units that are supportive of family households. Proposals such as ensuring that the Multi-family Tax Exemption encourages the development of 2 and 3 or more bedroom units, encouraging ground level housing in the urban core, and that bonus development provisions are focused on creating family sized and priced units are many of the recommendations presented (The Seattle Planning Commission, 2014). Furthermore the planning commission considered action plans that would call for innovative designs and plans that would assist in the accomplishment of the intended goal, as well as increased collaboration with the Seattle School District to ensure that housing and education worked cohesively (The Seattle Planning Commission, 2014). Perhaps the most important acknowledgment that The Seattle Planning Commission makes in the report is in the conclusion where they state that "It is time for Seattle to devote the resources and take the risks needed to foster a greater variety of housing so our city can remain a city for families of all incomes and sizes" (The Seattle Planning Commission, 2014). By taking this action there is the possibility of risk, but Seattle recognizes

that the opportunity to establish options for families is important to the vibrancy and success of the city.

## **2.3 - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

Philadelphia is unique from the other cities profiled for many reasons. Unlike Seattle, Portland, Dallas, Austin, and Vancouver it is a mature and established city. It is also not part of the explosive growth that has occurred in the Sun Belt and Pacific Northwest regions. Philadelphia also differed in their approach to retain families, in what may have resulted in an inadvertent consequence. Paul Levy, of the Center City District, attributes the growth and retention of families to the large push the city has made over the past 15 years to retain its college graduates (Polaneczky, 2011). As a result, the college graduates they were able to retain remained invested in the community and established roots, which included having children. The area defined as the Greater Center City, its boundaries established by Girard Avenue to the north and Pine Street to the south, experienced a boom in the birth of children between 2000 and 2010. A survey in 2006 found that over one in 5 adults between the ages of 35 and 54 had at least one child living with them (Levy, 2008). Additionally, a survey conducted in 2006 of day care centers in downtown experienced a 43% increase in enrollment (Levy, 2008). These increases documented mid decade were supported by the 2010 census which found that 24,419 children were born to parents in the Greater Center City area (Center City District & Central Philadelphia Development Corporation, 2013). While families with children only make up 6.1% of households in the core of Center City, the extended Center City (equivalent to a downtown adjacent) is made up of 18.9% of the households with children under the age of 18 and another 22.6% of family households without children (Center City District & Central Philadelphia Development Corporation, 2013).

Understanding that education and childcare is key to attracting families the city began to tackle these issues head on. Following a state takeover of the Philadelphia schools, the new superintendent altered the focus on diversified management and community-oriented education (Levy, 2008). This new management came through the form of improving public schools, contracting some privately, and turning others into charter, but all operating as if a single entity (Levy, 2008). This resulted in improved performance as well as partnerships, such as one with the Center City District to promote and improve the resources of the schools as an option to families that would typically choose private schools (Levy, 2008). Additionally, the Center City District was able to coordinate fairs that were attended by public, private, charter, and parochial schools in order to show parents the educational options that were available to them downtown (Levy, 2008). To further support families in Center City, the Center City District and Central Philadelphia Development Corporation have established a website *Kids in Center City Philadelphia*. Many cities include a family oriented section in their tourism campaigns, but *Kids in Center City Philadelphia*, differs in that its goal is to specifically address those that live in downtown Philadelphia. The website provides resources and information on schools, healthcare, transportation, and camps, as well as ongoing activities for children. The website uses interactive maps for parents to easily and quickly identify school districts, activity locations, and resources such as childcare facilities, shopping, and restaurants that identify themselves as family friendly. Additionally, the website operates a blog and running calendar of special events that are occurring as well as games and contests. The website has become a destination for parents and new comers, making the transition to urban parenthood efficient and simple.

The city's investment in children, families, and

education, has caused greater initiatives taken by parents. In addition to more involvement in improving the school system, a neighborhood resource center called Nest was opened. Created by three fathers who lived in Center City, Nest is a converted former adult entertainment club that is now a community resource center for arts, education, and social gathering for parents and children. The facility incorporates classes, parties, social functions, and a variety of other elements to provide services that are at times challenging to find in an urban environment, while resolving the suburban challenges of transporting between multiple locations to access these resources. Nest has proven the response families will make within their own community if they are aware that the city is attempting to make a place for them as well.

## 2.4 - Other Locations

While urban and emerging cities such as Seattle, and Vancouver may be expected to deliver programs and initiatives that makes their urban cores more balanced in demographics, there are a group of lesser expected cities as well. As part of the Dallas 360 program, the city has identified districts and communities within the urban core that may be prime locations for middle class family friendly developments. Acknowledging that housing prices is one of the largest hurdles, the city has identified districts where land is inexpensive and should be given priority for family friendly development, allowing more moderately priced units to enter the market that are rare to currently find (Flick, 2011). To support the additional proposed housing and developments Downtown Dallas Inc. has established a task force that will identify the existing educational and child care facilities, while assessing what facilities will be needed and will be supportive of middle-income families (Flick, 2011).

Along with Dallas, Austin, Texas established a task

force in 2008 to identify reasons and opportunities to keep families in downtown and to improve those elements that most affect a family's residency decision. Using several precedents the task force completed a comprehensive strategy in 2007 to encourage creating environments that were friendly and supportive of households with children. In regards to the 2010 Census, Austin may have been too late, as the urban core of Austin lost population in general, much of which is being attributed to the decline of family households and those with children. This by no means assumes that the attention that the subject has garnered in Austin hasn't created an impact. While many of the initiatives are awaiting implementation, and with the topic only gaining widespread attention in the city two years prior to the 2010 Census, there is still an opportunity to improve urban conditions for families if the task force report is executed. In 2012 and 2013 a popular website called the *UrbanFamily* had taken hold in Austin where the authors feature families, events, activities, and places to go in downtown Austin. The website has a unique spin, as they attempt to focus solely on families that live in high rise developments, and provide profiles interviewing the families about their lifestyle. This website demonstrates the desire for urban living options as well as the potential for community involvement and change.

Portland, Oregon also recognized the importance of families and the vibrancy that they bring to a city. In 2007 the city embarked on a *Schools, Families, Housing Initiative* directed at stopping the increasingly rapid rate at which families were leaving the City of Portland. While the program had a comprehensive consideration to education and housing, including marketing to new comers, increasing the functionality of schools, and various funding resources for families, its Courtyard Housing Competition may have been one of the more original proposals. The program was started as a way to

envision more dense housing than traditional single family units, while serving as an arm to the Schools, Families, Housing Initiative (City of Portland Bureau of Planning, 2007). One of the primary challenges of the competition was to develop a courtyard housing option that was friendly to families with children while still contributing to Portland's urban streetscape (City of Portland Bureau of Planning, 2007). The premise of providing the courtyard space for urban family friendly housing is on the desire and need of having semi-private outdoor space (City of Portland Bureau of Planning, 2007). Another primary motivational factor in establishing the competition as well as the initiative as a whole was the rapidly rising housing prices in the City of Portland and the inability of middle-income families to afford them. While the program brought new ideas to the table, its effect from a concrete policy standpoint was short lived. From the initiative, zoning changes were made to accommodate the preferred courtyard housing option, as well as assistance in stabilizing school districts whose enrollment was fluctuating. Regardless the program set forth in making the conversation on families in urban environments for Portland an important topic to residents, policy makers, and politicians.



*"It was a disaster..." (on relocating to the suburbs with their son). "Looking back, if we'd stayed in the city, I think Jonathan would've found more places to fit in. But we were so afraid of the city, we never gave it a chance."*

– Philadelphia area parents in an interview for *Philadelphia Magazine* –

### 3 - The State of Atlanta for Families

The areas of Atlanta that we are addressing are the communities of Midtown and Downtown. The boundaries of which we are examining are derived from those established by the Neighborhood Planning Units (NPU), created by the City of Atlanta. These two communities are roughly bound by the Interstate 75 and Interstate 85 intersection to the north, Monroe Drive to the east, Interstate 20 to the south, and a combination of several streets to the west such as Northside Drive and Marietta Street. These boundaries are not perfect in establishing the areas with the greatest density in Atlanta, as institutions such as the Georgia Institute of Technology and Georgia State University are captured. But to ensure that a contiguous urban fabric is accounted for these areas are also included.

#### Downtown Atlanta

Downtown represents the densest commercial district in the city with a wealth of cultural and recreational institutions with a rapidly growing population base. It is served by four Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) heavy rail stops, and traverses the Downtown Connector, with North Avenue serving as its northernmost border. Significant amenities and facilities include the Atlanta Civic Center, the Georgia Dome (soon to be replaced), Olympic Centennial Park, the Georgia Aquarium, the World of Coca-Cola, National Center for Civil and Human Rights, the College Football Hall of Fame, and the Children's Museum of Atlanta. Downtown Atlanta is also the government hub of the region, as well as home to Georgia State University, and the World Congress Center. It also includes the historic neighborhoods of Fairlie-Poplar and Castleberry Hill, and the redeveloped mixed income community of Centennial Place. The schools servicing the community are Centennial Place Elementary School, Hope Elementary School, Inman Middle School, and Grady High School.

Downtown Atlanta is represented by Central Atlanta Progress and the Downtown Improvement District as the community improvement and development organizations.

#### Midtown Atlanta

Midtown Atlanta has emerged as the second largest business district in Atlanta and one of the fastest growing communities. Where Downtown represents the historic Central Business District, Midtown has emerged as Atlanta's most cosmopolitan community. Rich in cultural and civic amenities, Midtown includes the High Museum, Woodruff Center for the Arts, Museum of Modern Design, the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum, Piedmont Park, the Eastside Trail of the Atlanta BeltLine, and the Center for Puppetry Arts. Also to be considered part of Midtown's NPU is the more recent Atlantic Station development and the Georgia Institute of Technology. The schools servicing the community are Centennial Place Elementary School, Morningside Elementary School, Springdale Park Elementary School, Inman Middle School, and Grady High School. Midtown Atlanta is represented by the Midtown Alliance as its community improvement and development organization.

#### Current Population Trends

As shown in Figure 2.2, the proximity of households with children have pushed further away from central Atlanta. While the City of Atlanta was not a magnet for households with children in 1990, the following two decades have seen a greater migration away from the city. From 1990 to 2010 Gwinnett County has remained a popular area for households with Children, but counties such as Fulton, Cobb, and DeKalb have seen a reduction in concentration. In their place Cherokee, Henry, and Douglas counties have emerged as popular communities for households with children. This has suggested

an even greater level of dispersal and reduced concentration of households with children.

The City of Atlanta ranks in the bottom ten for population under 18 within the city limits, as seen in Figure 2.1. This, despite the city having a wealth of suburban oriented neighborhoods, makes for an even less impressive percentage of children living within the urban core. Since 2000 the share of children under the age of 18 in the City of Atlanta has dropped from 22.33% to 19.383%, representing a loss of 11,594 children (United States Census Bureau). While that has been the case for many more established cities, places like Seattle, Washington; Denver, Colorado; and Austin, Texas have seen increases in the population under the age of 18. For cities such as Atlanta and Minneapolis, the loss of these residents has come with consequences. For Atlanta, it explains a large percentage of the discrepancy between the 2009 population estimates and the 2010 Census, which could result in the loss of federal funding and political power within the state of Georgia. For a city such as Minneapolis, the loss of nearly 7,000 residents under the age of 18 played a factor in the city experiencing negative

population growth (-.01%) rather than positive growth. For Atlanta, the potential consequences of not retaining families with children, and potential family households, presents the larger issue at hand that many cities may experience. As a city matures from its years as a boomtown, emphasis shifts from accommodating new residents, to recruiting new and maintaining existing. There are only so many young professionals in the country that can replace relocating families, and with more emerging cities such as Seattle, Denver, Austin, Raleigh, and Charlotte, this recruitment becomes a greater challenge. This establishes an even greater

*Percentage of Residents Under the Age of 18  
Bottom Ten*

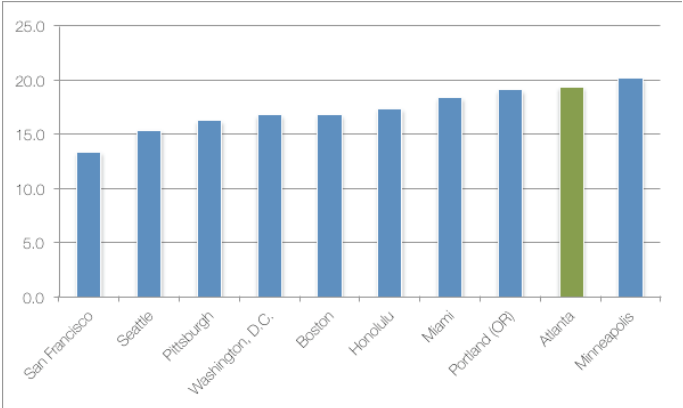


Figure 2.1 - Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau

*10 County Atlanta Region Concentration of Population Under 18 (By Census Tract)*

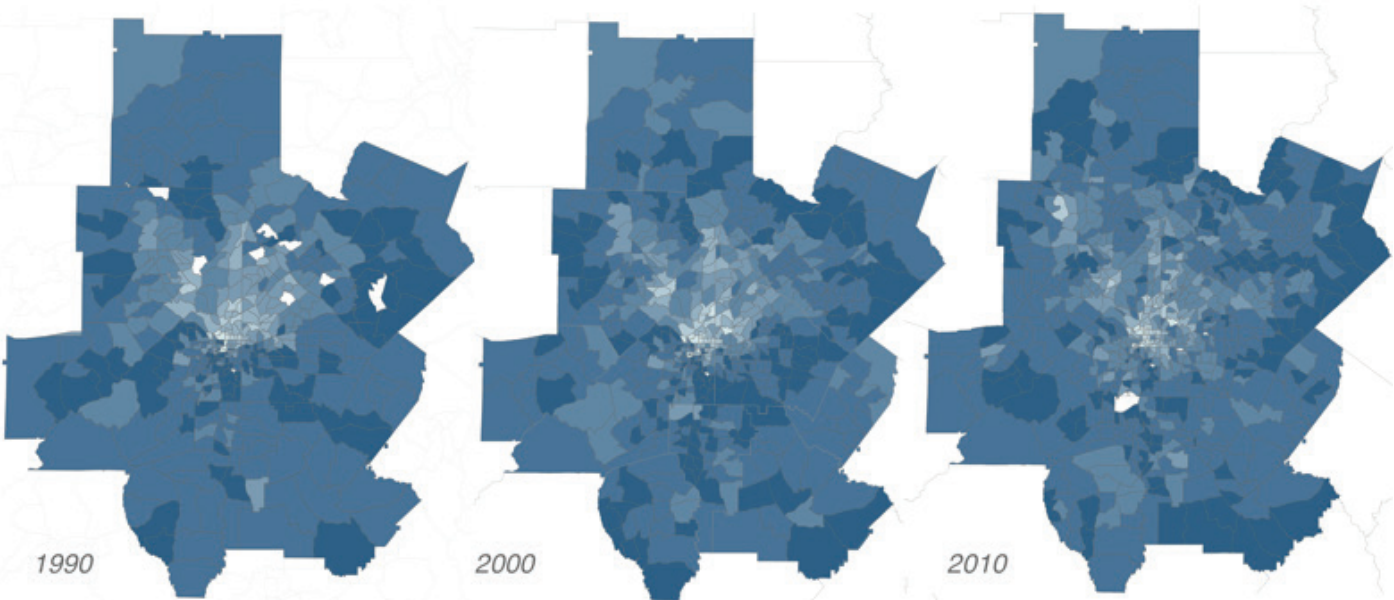


Figure 2.2 - Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau



priority to ensure that residents and their children stay. Families typically represent the most stable household structure and percentage of a city's population. Creating urban cores that are conducive to the growth of families and children provides a competitive edge against cities that do not.

Like many other cities, Atlanta saw its decline in the under 18 population in the age groups from 5 to 18. As a share of the population, the under age 5 group slightly shrank between 2000 and 2010, but their total number increased by .46%. A dramatic shift occurs once children reach the age of 5, as the total number of children between the age of 5 and 10 represented an 8.27% decline, 20.88% decline for those between the ages of 10 and 15, and a 13.63% decline for those between 15 and 18. This is similar to most major cities as seen in Figure 2.3. Several elements could be attributed to this decline for

children over the age of 5. This is the age where children enroll in school, housing size needs increase as children grow, and their autonomy begins to accelerate. With the case of Atlanta, the decline in the population between 10 and 15 significantly increased from the ages of 5 to 10, indicating that education, as many would presume, is not the only contributing factor to families leaving the city. For the communities of Midtown and Downtown Atlanta the percentage of residents under the age of 18 is even less optimistic than the city as a whole. Two Block Groups in the area considered parts of Midtown have percentages of residents under 18 that exceed the city wide average. This neighborhood, Ansley Park, is largely a single family, suburban style neighborhood. This is likely due to the economic status of the households as the median family income is significantly higher than the citywide average of \$55,521 at \$210,781 and \$178,380 respectively.

*Population Change by Cohort - Selected Cities*

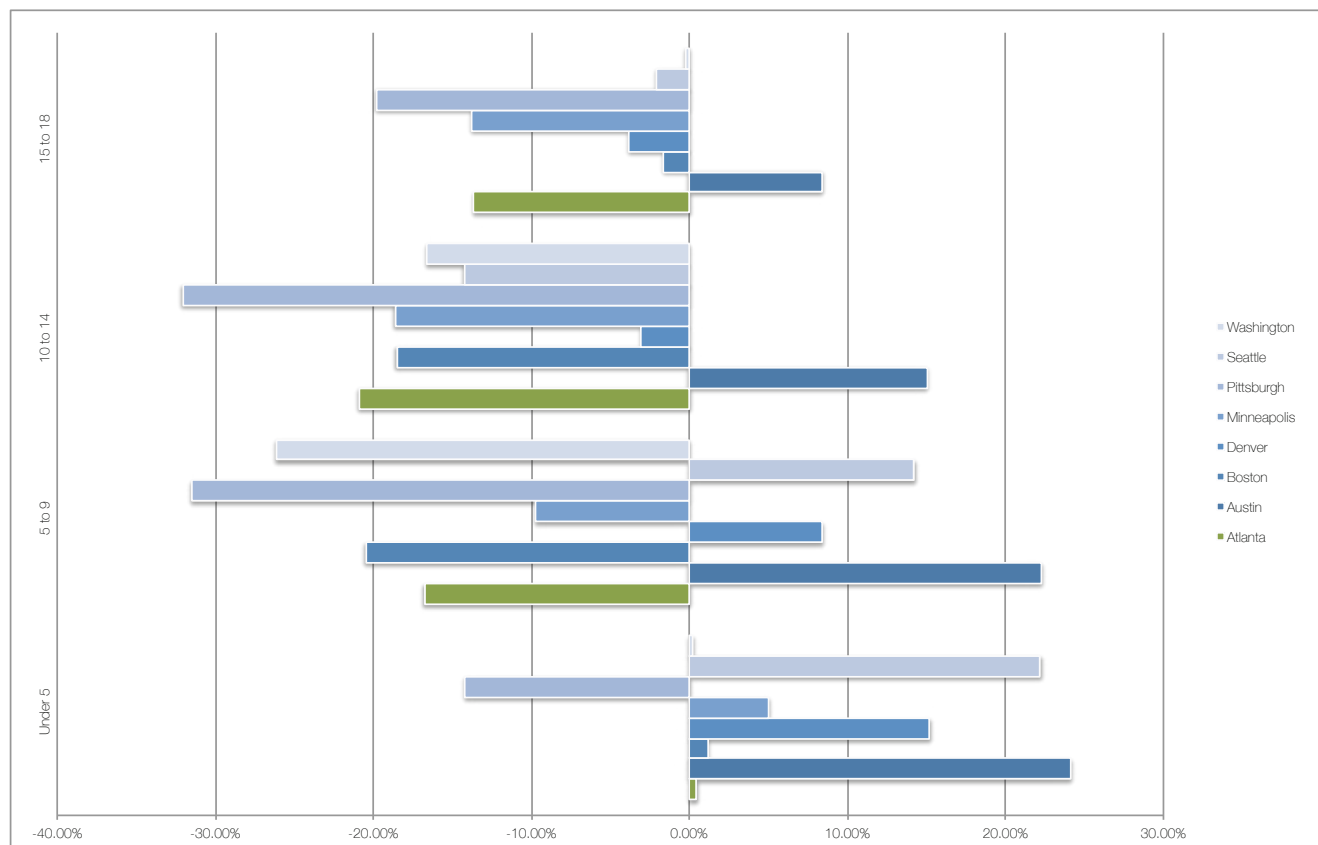


Figure 2.3- Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau



This is indicative of the theory that urban cores have become places for those that are wealthy or poor. This is further supported when examining the Block Group with the third highest concentration of residents under the age of 18 in the Midtown-Downtown core where the median family income is \$26,225. Figure 2.4 shows the concentration of children in the Midtown-Downtown core by Block Group based on the 2010 Census.

Between 2000 and 2010, Midtown and Downtown Atlanta has had a hemorrhaging of residents under the age of 18 as seen in Figure 2.5. This decline has far exceeded that of the overall city average with declining rates starting at 9.29% for those under the age of 5, accelerating to almost 30%

*Concentration of Residents Under the Age of 18  
Midtown and Downtown Atlanta*

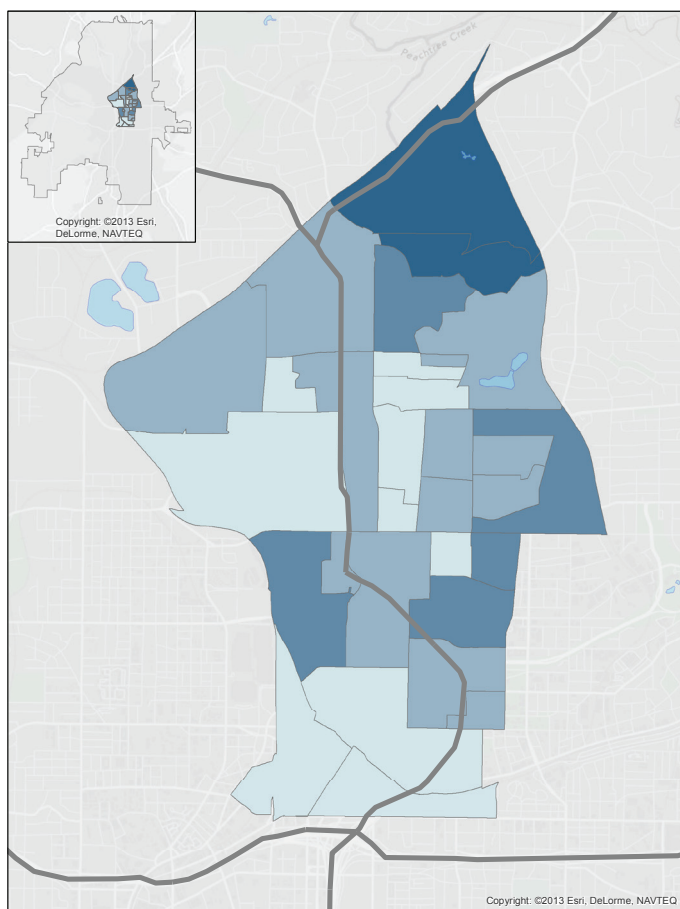


Figure 2.4 - Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau

between the ages of 5 and 14, and nearly 40% for those between the age of 15 and 17. This is against the national trend of increases in the under age 5 cohort in urban areas. As of the 2010 Census there were 3,842 residents under the age of 18 in Midtown and Downtown, making up 5.7% of the population. Between 2000 and 2010 Midtown and Downtown Atlanta saw an absolute increase of family households (two or more related individuals as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau) of 707, but a decrease of 4.4% as a share of total households. Many of these households may be married couples who are preparing to have children but have left the urban core. Residents under the age of 18 were predominately in households earning more than 125% of the median family income (MFI). Only 19% of children in Midtown and Downtown Atlanta lived in households earning 75% to 125% MFI, with 60% over 125% MFI.

*Change in Under 18 Population*

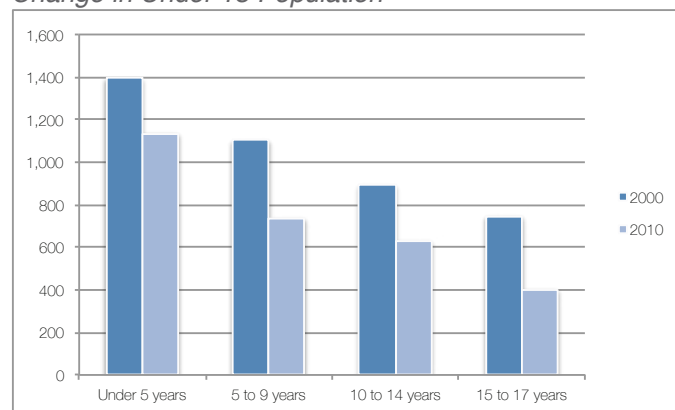


Figure 2.5 - Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau

## Education

Education remains a core issue, particularly for Atlanta, leaving relatively little opportunity to encourage families to relocate to the city. But preparing for the future, and its wealth of young professionals, the city could establish an urban core that will be well suited to retain its young professionals as they begin to establish changing households. As highlighted as a driving force behind the Dallas 360 Plan, families represent a

long desired sense of stability for communities, something that is greatly needed in a city with such a high percentage of transplants and mobile young professionals. For Atlanta, the city suffered a severe public education setback beginning in 2009 as a result of the standardized test cheating scandal. The scandal, widely considered to be the largest in United States public school system history, perpetuated the troubles of urban school education, reinforcing the theory of suburban communities having superior education systems. While this may hold true when Atlanta's suburban communities are compared to the Atlanta Public School System as a whole, it does not remain so when compared to the schools that service Midtown and Downtown Atlanta. While this does not provide a justification for the challenges of the remaining schools within the system, they may represent a starting point for attracting families with children beginning a deliberate and carefully orchestrated process of improving schools that are immediately adjacent to the urban core with the intent of transforming the system in its entirety. As previously outlined, Midtown and Downtown are serviced by four elementary schools, a middle school and a high school. Unfortunately the test cheating scandal left a mark on all Atlanta Public Schools (APS) whether they were involved or not. As for the six Midtown and Downtown servicing schools only one was identified in the cheating investigation, Morningside Elementary, which was isolated to four classrooms (Wilson, Bowers, & Hyde, 2011). With five of the six schools not part of the cheating scandal, and one with only isolated incidents, using the state CRCT examination scores provides the most consistent benchmark to compare and contrast academic performance. Using fifth grade and eighth grade testing, the elementary and middle schools that service Midtown and Downtown are compared to the ten county metropolitan region averages.

When comparing elementary schools, the two that

service Midtown east of the Downtown Connector, Springdale Park and Morningside score significantly higher on all tests (Reading, English & Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Sciences) than each of the ten metropolitan counties. While counties such as Gwinnett and Fayette scored fairly closely with these two elementary schools in regards to Science, they trail substantially in the remaining categories. Additionally these schools typically have between 60 and 80% of their students exceeding the state standard scores in each subject, while many of the suburban school districts are between 30 and 50 percent. Both of these schools service high-income communities and a substantial percentage of those that are above the 125% median family income. Centennial Place Elementary, which services much of Midtown west of the Downtown Connector and portions of Downtown does not score as high as the aforementioned schools. Despite servicing one of the lowest income groups in Midtown and Downtown, Centennial Place still performs at a comparable level to the surrounding suburban communities. In the subject of Science, Centennial lags behind many suburban districts, with the exception of Clayton and DeKalb Counties. In the remaining subjects Centennial is comparable to counties such as Cherokee, Cobb, and Gwinnett; counties that are widely regarded in the Atlanta region as being superior to APS schools. Hope Elementary, which services the remaining portion of Downtown, as well as other communities such as the Old Fourth Ward, represents the lowest performing elementary school in the urban core. Hope represents the largest education hurdle for Atlanta's urban core, and particularly Downtown and the emerging community of Old Fourth Ward. Page 51 shows the performance of these schools, by subject, in relationship to the region.

Inman Park Middle School represents the lone middle school that services the Midtown and

Downtown communities of Atlanta. Inman, much like Springdale Park and Morningside Elementary, outperforms the suburban schools in most subjects. With the exception of Math and Reading, Inman students score higher on a consistent basis. For Math and Science Inman ranks second to only Fayette County. As for percentage of students that exceed the state standard, Inman ranges between 40 and 60%, consistent with many of the top performing suburban districts such as Cherokee, Fayette, and Cobb Counties.

When looking at the schools that service the urban core of Atlanta it is clear that they perform equally or better as their suburban counterparts with the exception of Hope Elementary. Where these schools could raise questions, as seen on page 51, is their consistency in performance. While most of the suburban school districts have performed at a consistent upward trajectory, including lower performing districts such as Clayton and DeKalb Counties, Atlanta's urban core schools have seen slightly more dramatic increases and decreases in testing performance. Furthermore, the schools have seen a slight downward trend between 2012 and 2013, despite maintaining higher performance than the suburban schools.

Public schools are not the only educational resources for families and those with children. Despite the rise in technology libraries remain an important fixture within communities. They serve as an educational, social, and recreational resource. If incorporated into the urban fabric, a local public library can serve a multitude of functions while being one of the most important civic functions within the community. Libraries serve as an extension to the school system. As additional resource centers, and as early learning centers and places for social development, libraries can act in support of schools, prepping future students and supporting current ones.

Beginning in February of 2014 the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System announced a 36% reduction in service hours, eliminating several programs and significantly reducing operating hours (Warburton, 2014). For libraries such as the Buckhead and Midtown branches, both in densely populated areas, story times geared for children between the ages of 1 and 5 were eliminated. This removes a resource that not only creates opportunities for learning and socializing for children, but also a communal gathering mechanism for parents and their children.

While the quality of many Midtown and Downtown Atlanta schools may be exceptional, their proximity is not. Within the core of Midtown and Downtown only Grady High School could be considered highly walkable to most residents within the communities. The quality of such schools is the most important

*Location of Public Schools Servicing Midtown and Downtown Atlanta*

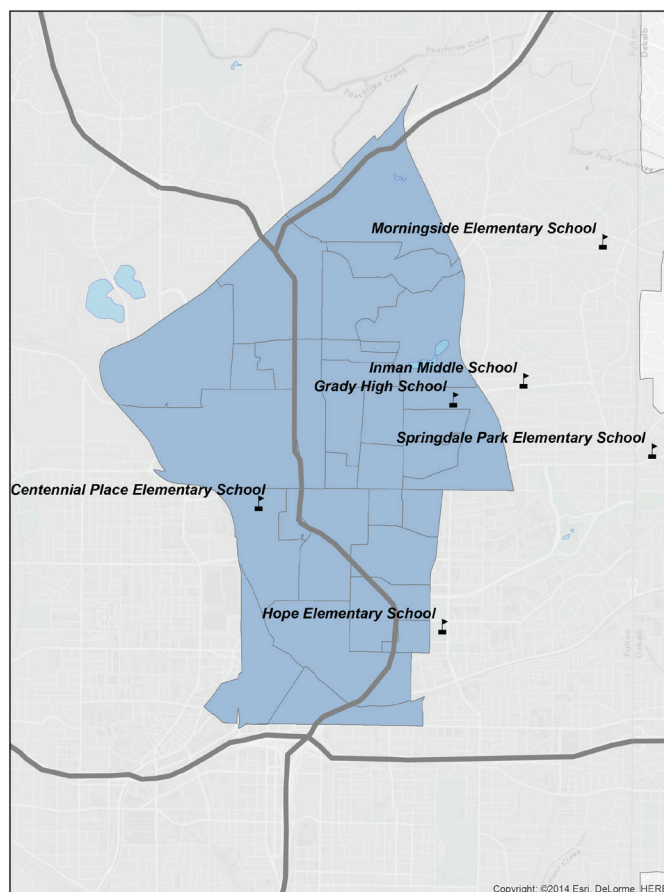
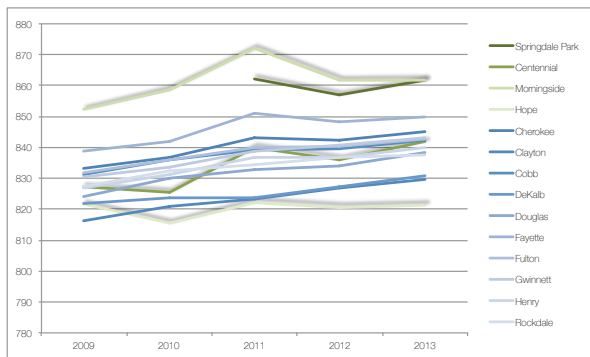
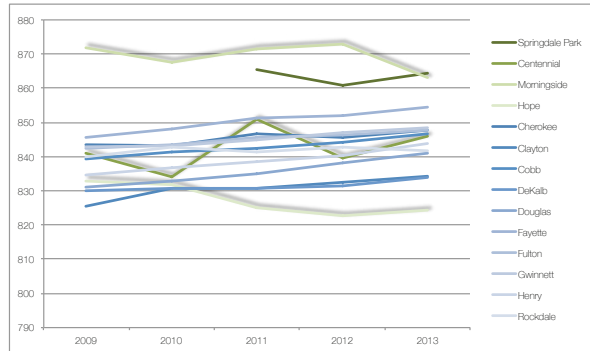


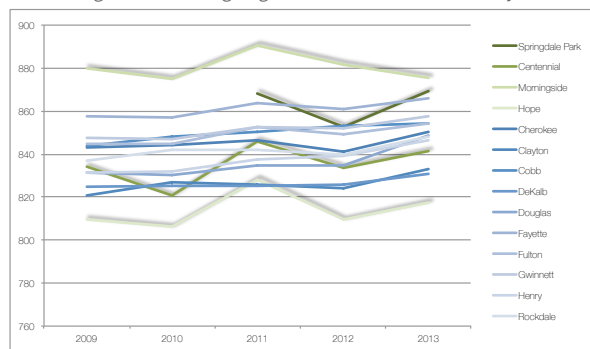
Figure 2.6



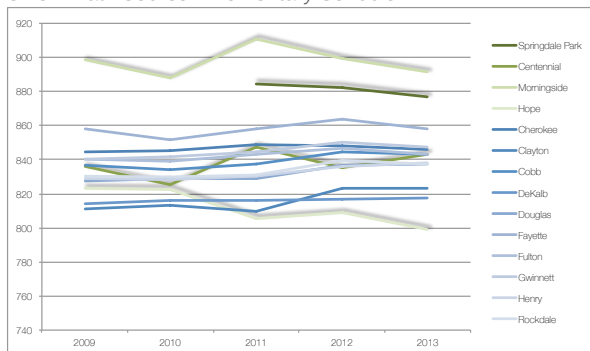
CRCT Reading Scores - Elementary Schools



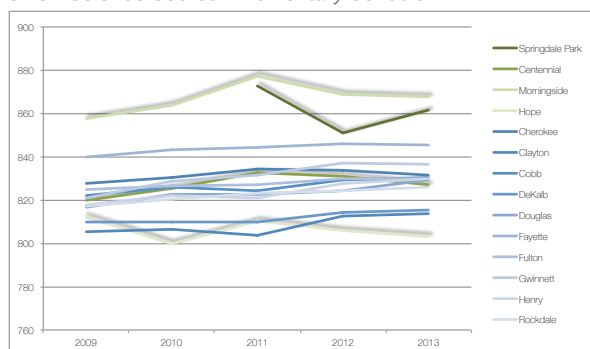
CRCT English and Language Arts Scores- Elementary Schools



CRCT Math Scores - Elementary Schools

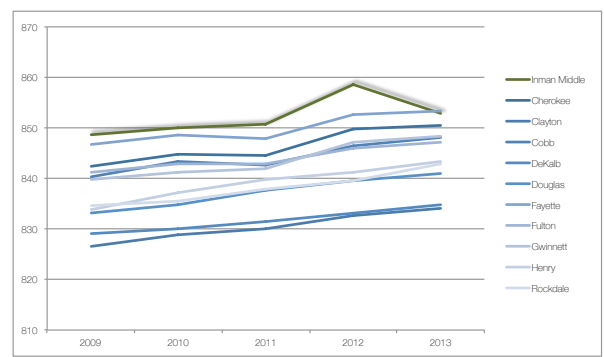


CRCT Science Scores - Elementary Schools

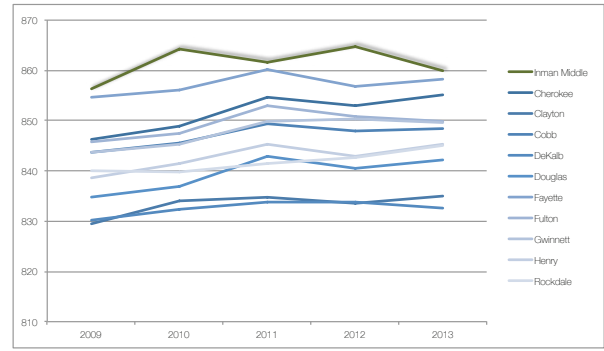


CRCT Social Science Scores - Elementary Schools

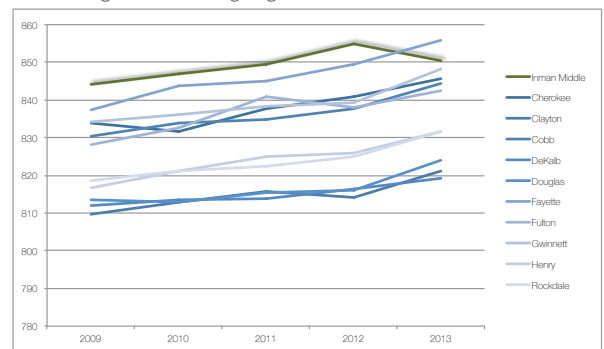
All Scores Provided by Georgia Department of Education



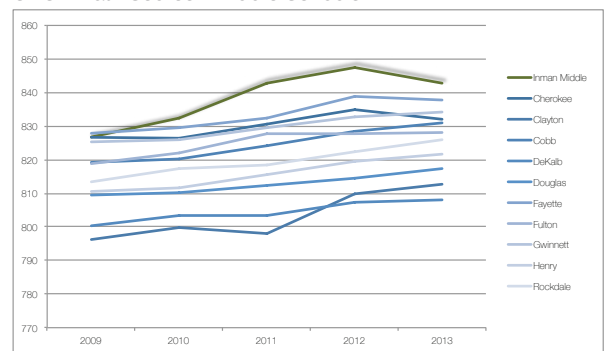
CRCT Reading Scores - Middle Schools



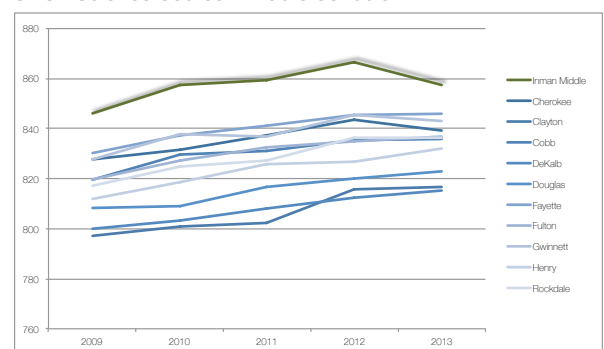
CRCT English and Language Arts Scores- Middle Schools



CRCT Math Scores - Middle Schools



CRCT Science Scores - Middle Schools



CRCT Social Science Scores - Middle Schools

factor, but their location can be equally as important. While many suburban schools are located far from residential concentration, having a truly urban school can be an asset for an entire community, as well as enhancing the walkability of students. Figure 2.6 shows the proximity of each public school, elementary through high school, to Midtown and Downtown. As shown, the most urban areas of Downtown and Midtown are not within walking range of a public school.

## Housing

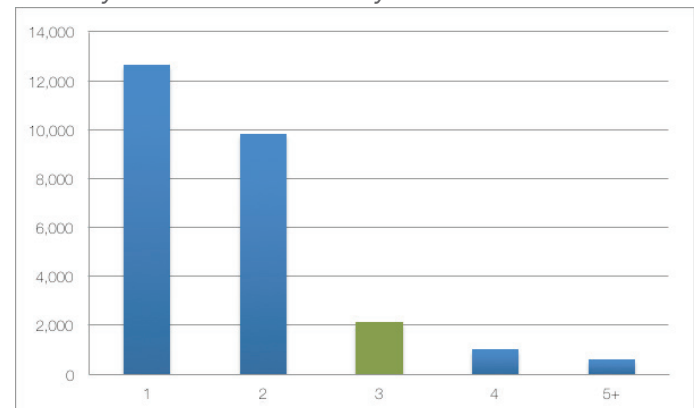
Midtown and Downtown Atlanta have experienced a residential resurgence, often at the expense of larger households. As this is written several apartment high rises and mid rises are under construction in Midtown and several former office buildings in Downtown are being re-purposed as housing. With minimal control or city input, these apartment buildings are being rubber stamped throughout the communities, replacing underutilized surface parking lots with new residential. A majority of these units are intended for singles and young professionals.

Of the rental units entering the market since 2000 less than 40% of downtown units are two bedrooms, and 0% are three-bedrooms (Haddow & Company, 2013). This same trend can be found in Midtown where less than 40% of units are two-bedrooms and less than 3% are three bedrooms with only two developments offering a modest amount of larger units (Haddow & Company, 2013). Of those developments offering three bedroom units or larger the average rent is over \$2,600 per month representing nearly a \$1,000 per month difference from two bedroom units (Haddow & Company, 2013). This is substantially higher than the less than \$500 difference between one and two bedroom units (Haddow & Company, 2013). Furthermore, the occupancy rate of the 83 available units between Midtown and Downtown that are three bedrooms or more, is 95.2% (Haddow & Company,

2013), demonstrating a high demand yet low supply. When considering Intown Atlanta as a whole, there remains a lack of family friendly units despite no sub market having an occupancy rate below 95% and with most ranging between 98% and 100% (Haddow & Company, 2013).

Overall there are significantly less numbers of three bedroom units than one and two bedroom units in the Downtown and Midtown communities amongst all housing units. Three bedroom units make up slightly over 8% of all housing units. Figure 2.7 shows the concentration of three bedroom units. While no hard data exists on the number of bedrooms an Atlanta area family prefers in their home, it would be a safe assumption that three would be the preferential number, particularly since two-bedroom units make up 38% of the Midtown and Downtown housing market, and the number of families with children remains dismal.

*Quantity of Residential Units by Number of Bedrooms*



*Figure 2.7 - Data Source: American Community Survey*

As of March 23rd, 2014 an analysis of Georgia Multiple Listing Service homes shows that there were a total of 44 housing units for sale within the defined Midtown and Downtown boundaries that were three bedrooms or more. The average price was \$925,988, and when excluding foreclosures that average increased to \$1,009,565. An overwhelming number of these units were single-family homes (72.7%) and were located on the periphery of



Midtown and Downtown Atlanta, many in suburban style communities such as Ansley Park. Of these 44 housing units nine are affordable to those earning the Median Family Income of Atlanta, representing .15% of the Midtown and Downtown Housing Market. Of these nine units only three are within the Midtown and Central Atlanta Progress districts. (Insert Footnote on Calculations.) These statistics demonstrate that prior to having an education problem, central Atlanta has a housing problem.

Unlike cities such as Seattle, Portland, and Austin, Atlanta has not recognized the challenges presented by the loss of families, particularly those in the urban core. The city has continued to encourage and permit projects that are almost entirely devoted to young professionals and singles with little consideration given to the growth or aging of these residents in the urban core. As mentioned previously, cities such as Seattle, Portland, and Vancouver have given priority consideration to ensuring that urban housing is affordable and sized appropriately for families.

*"I understand the value of a yard. I understand the value of a kid coming home covered in dirt because he was playing in the mud. But that can also be accomplished – and there is a lot of value of living in a city environment. The people that I meet that grew up in a city, whether its New York or Boston, I like them. They're well adjusted. They're not freaked out by two men holding hands. They're not freaked out by socio- or economic cultural differences, and that's, I think, an important gift to give children."*

– Jim Gaffigan –

## 4 - Recommendations

Overcoming many of the challenges that cities face in attracting and retaining families may appear to be a daunting task, particularly with federal subsidies and initiatives that encourage a more suburban environment for families. But there are a multitude of opportunities for municipalities to level the playing field against federal subsidies and their suburban competition.

Every city will have its own unique set of challenges. Some may be more affordable but have struggling school systems, while others may be affordable and have quality schools but have failed to market themselves to families. While the forthcoming solutions are targeted towards Atlanta, Georgia, and may have some applicability to other cities, it is important to note that there is no silver bullet to entice families into cities. It is also important to know that certain groups will have a predisposition and desire to live in urbanized areas as a family, while others will vehemently oppose it. These solutions and recommendations are targeted towards those that have a predilection for urbanized domiciles and that slightly larger group of individuals who may find themselves apprehensive about cities yet unsatisfied and discontent with suburban life.

### Partnerships

Identifying stakeholders and forming partnerships is the first priority for the City of Atlanta to begin crafting solutions and making Midtown and Downtown attractive places to not only start a family but to also raise one. Establishing a core group of associations and political interests that have a consistent and cohesive understanding of the problem and the solutions will allow for the most effective and transformative solutions possible to be created. Midtown Alliance and Central Atlanta Progress represent two of the most essential organizations to step forward and take the lead on this initiative,

both serving as the community organizations with the greatest vested interest in developing diverse and sustainable communities. Midtown Alliance and Central Atlanta Progress can use their localized knowledge to identify the best opportunities to enact change, whether it be identifying development opportunities, establishing design guidelines, or pursuing funds and resources from Atlanta Public Schools, the City of Atlanta or other potential stakeholders. Additionally, these organizations hold the greatest power and opportunities to establish and lead a marketing and branding campaign that can assist in changing the image of these communities into one that is not only welcoming, but supportive of families. A branding campaign that exceeds street light banners, and is aimed at existing residents and regional and national opportunities.

While Midtown Alliance and Central Atlanta Progress can serve as the coordinating and identifying arms of creating a more family friendly urban core, it is ultimately the City of Atlanta and Atlanta Public Schools who can offer the greatest amount of resources and opportunities. Using organizations such as the Midtown Alliance and Central Atlanta Progress as channels for communication and program administrators, Atlanta Public Schools and the City of Atlanta can offer a wealth of resources and opportunities to improve housing options, educational quality and resources, land use, and urban design initiatives that can improve the overall attractiveness of the urban core to families. Each of these organizations should also work closely with groups such as Invest Atlanta and the Chamber of Commerce in order to reach beyond the borders of Atlanta, and demonstrate to relocating families that Atlanta can be the preferred urban option for families, locally and nationally.



## Marketing

As previously mentioned, the local community improvement organizations represent the greatest opportunity for marketing their community to families. Midtown Alliance has been a force in establishing the identity and branding of Midtown Atlanta. Utilizing tools such as streetlight banners, organization of events, and the Internet, Midtown Alliance has been successful in enhancing the image of Midtown. Similarly, Central Atlanta Progress has successfully increased the image and livability of Downtown Atlanta. Where both of these organizations have fell short is in attracting families and those with children through targeted marketing. A resource, preferably one that is united between Downtown and Midtown Atlanta, is needed similar to that of the Center City District (CCD) in Philadelphia. CCD established an entirely individual website for children and families with children. They have used this opportunity not as one to market to tourists with children, as many cities do, but specifically targeted to those that live and wish to live in the Greater Center City area of Philadelphia. The website provides streamlined resources and information on the schools serving the community, both public and private, while providing maps that outline everything from grocery stores and everyday shopping, to businesses and events. This website places all of the necessary tools that parents would need in an easy and accessible format, providing one less hurdle for parents that are interested in urban living. Furthermore, the resource needs to partner with, as well as identify businesses that are family friendly. The community improvement districts could establish an entire branding campaign on the focus of being family friendly, providing profiles on the website while establishing a logo that can be placed in windows to inform parents and children that this is a business that supports creating a diverse and friendly community to families. Much like the independent website started in Austin, Texas, this could provide an opportunity to profile a family that

lives in Midtown or Downtown each month or week. This could provide an insight, and practical face that readers could identify with. While the primary strength in conveying information and informing citizens that the communities are making a legitimate effort to attract families will be welcomed, those who are considering or on the fence about doing so can gain insight from those that are experiencing it.

As presented, the quality of many of the public schools that service Midtown and Downtown exceeds that of its suburban counterparts. As such these schools need to be presented and marketed to demonstrate their accomplishments and successes. One of the largest challenges Midtown and Downtown may face is lasting perceptions based upon issues that may have been more prevalent years ago. While APS may have been shrouded in scandal from the CRCT cheating investigation, most of the schools servicing Midtown and Downtown were not implicated, and remain top level performing schools. While not isolating themselves from the City of Atlanta, Midtown and Downtown need to capitalize on the performance of their schools and use it to market their own community while representing a step in the right direction for the city as a whole.

Furthermore, a marketing campaign established by Midtown and Downtown, needs to capitalize on its existing resources while other initiatives and programs are under development. Building upon its access to quality education, the marketing campaign needs to include its access to amenities and culture such as the High Museum, Piedmont Park, the BeltLine, and Centennial Olympic Park. Most importantly it needs to market in competition to the suburbs, but not with suburban families as the target audience. As a city with a wealth of young professionals, the marketing goals need to be aimed at keeping professionals as they mature and establish families, as a priority. These are residents that may

already be heavily invested in their community. By marketing to them, they can create the opportunity of keeping these households as they mature in their peak earning years.

## Education

While numerous schools that service Midtown and Downtown Atlanta are exceptional, there remain opportunities for improvement. In the case of Centennial Elementary, being of equal quality to suburban schools will not sway potential families from staying or relocating, nor discourage new comers from selecting the suburbs. Additionally the lower performance when compared to Springdale Park and Morningside exposes the disparity in education between wealthier communities and those of more modest means. Improving the quality of a school should not be dependent on the wealth on a hyper-local level. This also applies to the lowest performing school in the community, Hope Elementary. As such partnerships and new methods to improve parental involvement and school performance need to be established, while exploring new methods to improve schools.

While many declare parental involvement as the key, schools need overall strong community support from those who may not be parents. Urban schools, when sited properly can serve as an asset and community center for an entire community. By engaging the overall public, and the community, whether parents of students or not, a school has a greater opportunity to garner support from a much larger base. Properly sited urban schools can provide resources and amenities to a community, serving a dual purpose. Much of this relates to community-oriented schools where all residents can draw upon recreational and educational resources of a school. Encouraging events that engage the entire community, using the opportunity to market their impact on the community can convey the importance as well. With this, schools

have the opportunity to not only engage parents of existing students, but also potential parents of school attendees, harvesting their potential for involvement in advance of their own children. With greater support and involvement from the entire community, less emphasis and dependency can be placed on parental involvement. Non parents of the community, and those of non school aged children could be incentivized for involvement, tutoring, or classroom adoption. Incentives could range from community recognition and awards, to property tax benefits, pending partnership with the City of Atlanta and Fulton County. These incentives could be weighted based upon a specified level of involvement.

Schools and the city could also partner with developers. While cities such as Seattle are creating opportunities to provide density and height bonuses for developers that provide space for school resources, the same bonuses could be applied to developers that provide other educational resources. Currently a developer can earn points for low income tax credits by providing educational resources and after school programs that partner with local schools as a means to enhance educational opportunities. Developers could be provided tax breaks or development bonuses for providing such resources that could have a structured curriculum that supports under-performing schools while also serving as a tutoring or mentoring system.

A city such as Atlanta, with strong corporate leadership, should also tap their commercial and business base for greater involvement and investment. School and resource funding is not an issue exclusive to Atlanta. But Atlanta's corporate and business strength is unique, with several international companies that were homegrown and invested in the city. Organizations such as APS, Midtown Alliance, and Central Atlanta Progress

could partner with larger companies for classroom sponsorship, mentoring, and tutoring. This presents an opportunity to bring more financial investment into schools such as Hope Elementary and Centennial Place, but also additional involvement to improve academic performance and overall resources. With many of these schools in the shadows of companies and institutions such as Coca-Cola, Georgia Institute of Technology, and Equifax, schools can leverage their importance to recruiting top tier talent to garner support and involvement from the business environment of urban Atlanta. Furthermore, the city could offer tax benefits to companies that are involved. Employers could offer a community service day for employees specifically designed at assisting schools such as Hope and Centennial reach higher levels of academic achievement.

Atlanta's higher education institutions can also play a substantial role. With the presence of the Georgia Institute of Technology, Emory University, Georgia State University, and the Atlanta University Consortium, there are a multitude of opportunities to engage talented students and professors to enhance opportunities to access additional resources and expertise. Working with APS, Atlanta's higher education institutions could play an important role in not only enhancing educational achievement, but also demonstrating the importance of quality education. Resources such as tutoring and mentoring as part of a required community involvement curriculum serves as an excellent resource for public school students. Additionally, these university and college students become engaged and vested within their community.

As previously noted, Grady High School and Centennial Elementary remain the only public schools located in the immediate Midtown or Downtown area, with Centennial separated from much of Midtown by the Downtown Connector. The remaining four

schools that service these communities are located at the outer fringes of the urban area or beyond. As such, APS and the City of Atlanta need to coordinate on the future consideration of an urban core school. This commitment demonstrates to residents that the city is serious about making an urban environment appealing to families, while having the cornerstone of a diverse community in their plans. Identifying opportunities to partner with developers to include a school in a proposal, while partnering with community amenities to reduce the duplication of resources, much like Seattle has begun working towards could improve the viability of a future urban school. This would also be a reverse position that APS has taken with many other schools, which has ultimately lead to closings which seal the fate of a community no longer being family friendly in its long term future, much like the closing of Spring Street Elementary had on Midtown Atlanta. Regardless the approach, this needs to be an initiative between APS and the City of Atlanta that assists in removing the firewall that exists when planning for educational resources and facilities.

## **Housing**

The real estate development market is reactive. While nearly all forms of development present risk, many are not willing to take one without an incentive or protection from risk, and with demand for urban living a market risk, real estate developers will be even less likely. In many cities density bonuses have served as a measure for developers to take risk or include elements such as affordable housing or civic amenities. A density bonus presents an opportunity for developments to defray the costs of an addition that would generally not produce the most desired return. The density bonus tool, when applied appropriately can be a powerful tool to entice developers to include more risky components to a project. With the limited supply of family sized multi-family dwellings in Midtown and Downtown,

providing a density or height bonus to developers may encourage the development of 3 bedroom condominiums or townhomes.

While condominiums may be a preferred model of housing for developers, and for some families, Vancouver development has established that townhomes can be high successful in dense urban areas. The townhome represents an optimal form of housing for urban families for several reasons. It provides access from the street level, avoiding multiple flights of steps and elevators. With no residents above or below the townhome, there is less of a risk of families being disturbed or disturbing other residents. And lastly they present as a comfortable transition as well as competition to suburban single-family housing. While the density of a townhome is greater than a traditional single-family neighborhood and opportunities for private green space remain limited, it can provide a greater sense of privacy than a condominium is capable of. Furthermore, the addition of condominiums at street level provides a greater opportunity to activate a street, similar to that of Chicago Graystones and New York Brownstones, that normally doesn't occur. Many current urban condominium and apartment developments are occupied by leasing offices, parking, and empty retail shell space at the ground level. With the contracting retail market, due to online shopping and changing habits, townhomes represent an alternative development form that increases the vitality of a street while diversifying its housing alternatives and residents. Similar to the Vancouver model, townhomes can serve as a podium for a larger scale condominium or apartment development. Where townhomes are not an option, three bedroom condominiums can be a substitute while still warranting the density or height bonus, provided that they are on the ground or lowest level of the building for many of the same reasons that townhomes may be more optimal for families.

Simply providing these units will not be enough to entice and retain urban families. As previously noted the cost of a three-bedroom home in Midtown and Downtown Atlanta is significantly higher than its suburban counterparts. These higher prices are attributed to several reasons. Cities are typically more expensive, and justifiably so given the amenities, location, and supply of housing. Additionally, the cost of land is often significantly higher. As a result the price of housing units dramatically rises, and even more so when the particular housing unit is scarce. In order to provide housing that is affordable to those between 75% and 125% MFI, the density and height bonus could also be applied to entice developers to provide units that are more modestly priced for middle-income families, while meeting targeted size requirements simultaneously. These housing units will likely remain higher than those in suburban communities, but the advent of programs such as location efficient mortgages and overall education and information on the distribution of income to housing and transportation costs could demonstrate that families would be better off placing more investment in an appreciable than one that is depreciable. The goal is to bring urban housing for families into the realm of affordability, and not the scarce and expensive resource that it is today, and has been previously outlined.

In order to encourage a community, one that is welcoming of diverse housing types, and those with families, guidelines should be established, similar to those of Vancouver, that outlines a minimum number or percentage of units that meet family needs. This ensures that there is not too limited a number of family style units where they would feel isolated or alone. The provision of a height or density bonus would also assure a developer that their project would not be fully compromised by this new program.

Along with development bonuses, cities can also play a crucial role in attracting families in regards to housing. By providing land subsidies or swaps, cities can create opportunities for more affordable parcels for developers in exchange for providing appropriately sized and priced units. For home buyers, property taxes play an equally essential role to the purchasing price of a home as does the mortgage. Unfortunately, property taxes remain much higher in most urban areas, and while many justifications can be made on the number of services a city can provide versus a suburb, most families see it as an additional bill and expense to be reduced. As such, providing a property tax freeze or reduction for a specified number of years in order to encourage families to remain and even relocate could serve as beneficial. This could reduce the impact of a high property tax rate to families, while allowing cities to capitalize on the spending and tax revenue power of a family to offset the break provided. In order to ensure that families will remain as their children age, the break could also incorporate a length requirement in order to take full advantage of the freeze or reduction. This model could be taken from the many elderly, brownfield, and historic property tax breaks often offered.

The location of family friendly housing is as essential as its provision. Along with close proximity to daily needs and services such as childcare facilities and grocery stores, providing safe streets is an essential element. Midtown and Downtown Atlanta is fragmented by multiple one-way high capacity streets such as Spring and West Peachtree. While these roads are unnecessarily wide and often dangerous for pedestrian activity, they are also unsuitable for street level housing, and in many cases retail. Rather, family-friendly housing development should be concentrated on many of the secondary streets that bisect the urban core until

other streets can be retrofitted to be more oriented to pedestrians and safety for pedestrians. Additionally this creates opportunities for smaller neighborhoods that can be established amongst the larger Midtown and Downtown communities, creating an enhanced sense of identity.

The amenities provided within an urban housing development that proposes family units must also be considered. One of the most often cited benefits of single family suburban home ownership is the provision of private greenspace in the form of a yard. Courtyard housing, similar to that proposed by the City of Portland should be given consideration, particularly at the base of a residential high rise. Furthermore, Atlanta should consider adopting certain criteria such as what is used in Vancouver that establishes certain requirements on the location of greenspace and playground amenities so that they remain visible to other common amenities and by units designed with families in mind. This creates similar opportunities for independent play while a parent can comfortably watch over their child. Furthermore, developments with proposed family friendly units should also include indoor amenities for children and families, such as indoor recreational rooms, study areas, or reading rooms, a common concern in Vancouver's North False Creek.

Design is a crucial component, as defined by the City of Vancouver and their prior research used to inform developments such as North False Creek. While design preferences in Atlanta may very well differ from those in Vancouver, there are certain commonalities regarding privacy, layout, and design that will transcend all cities. A common complaint for North False Creek was the consistent use of gray and glass building materials, including many of the town homes. While stylistically, this may be the popular modern form of design, there are few homes with this appearance. This is not to say that

condominiums and townhomes should resemble the stylistic character of a single-family home, but the warmth of certain materials and composition should not be underestimated. Not only does this allow for designs to be marketable to a more diverse range of potential occupants, but prevents a building from being aged or dated as a result of restricting itself to current stylistic trends.

## **Priority Development Opportunities**

Much like Dallas has begun to assess, Atlanta needs to identify available and underused parcels for current and future opportunities for family friendly housing and communities. These communities should have existing, or the potential, for safe and easy walkability to schools, parks, cultural amenities and every day needs. This allows for developments to take full advantage of the improved quality of life that the urban core can provide. When identifying the proximity of such services, opportunities should identify not only proximity but also quality of the services. Figure 2.8 demonstrates an analysis of underutilized parcels in Midtown and Downtown Atlanta. These are identified as vacant parcels, parcels with abandoned structures, surface parking, and aging parking decks. In order to determine the parcels with the greatest family friendly potential, each parcel was scored based upon their proximity to grocery stores, cultural and recreational amenities, childcare facilities, hospitals, libraries, public schools, parks, and rail transit stops. Parcels were rewarded for proximity, quality (schools), as well as quantity, understanding that having multiple options for each variable can be highly beneficial for a family.

Sites with the greatest potential were located in south Midtown and in Downtown Atlanta along the eastern periphery of Centennial Olympic Park. While these sites lack high quality education access, they have the greatest access to parks and cultural

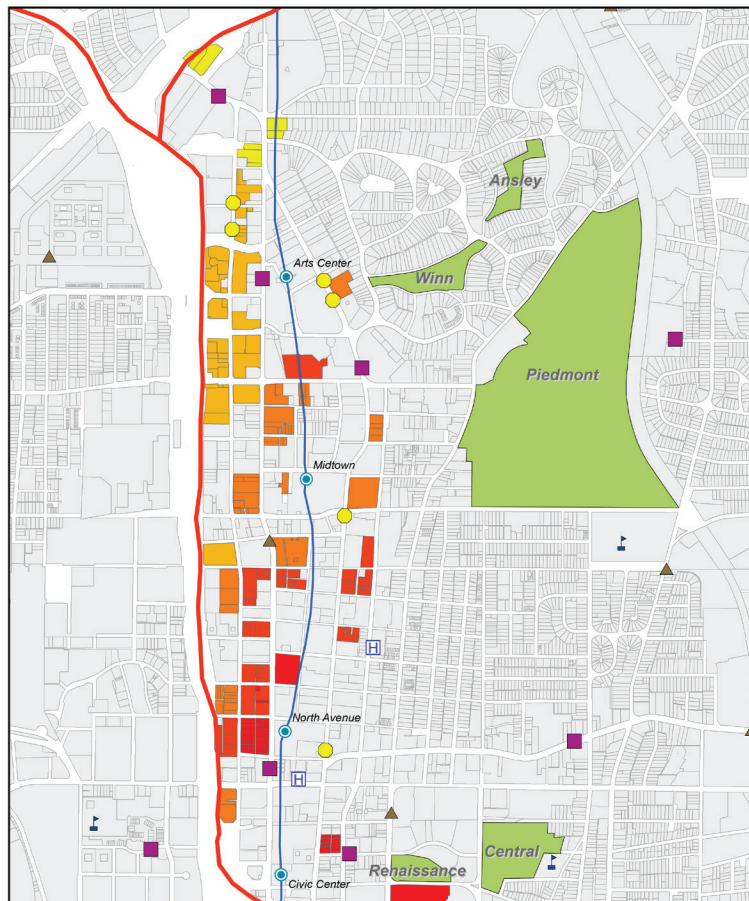
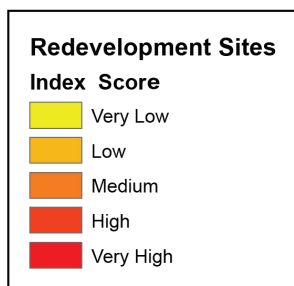
amenities, as well as transit, childcare, and medical facilities. Using this type of analysis Atlanta can identify priority development opportunities and employ overlay and special interests districts in order to encourage family friendly developments. Additionally, the city can use this form of analysis to identify areas that can be improved so that they are more family friendly attractive, such as north Midtown. Areas such as north Midtown, which have access to quality cultural amenities and education, can be improved through additional park space and closer proximity to community schools, and daily services and needs.

The areas considered do not represent a comprehensive analysis of the Midtown and Downtown communities, but offer an example as to what amenities and services should be considered when assessing a particular neighborhood. With the growth of neighborhoods such as Midtown West, the Old Fourth Ward, and Lindbergh are emerging as dense and active communities that should be further explored for opportunities for family friendly urban living.

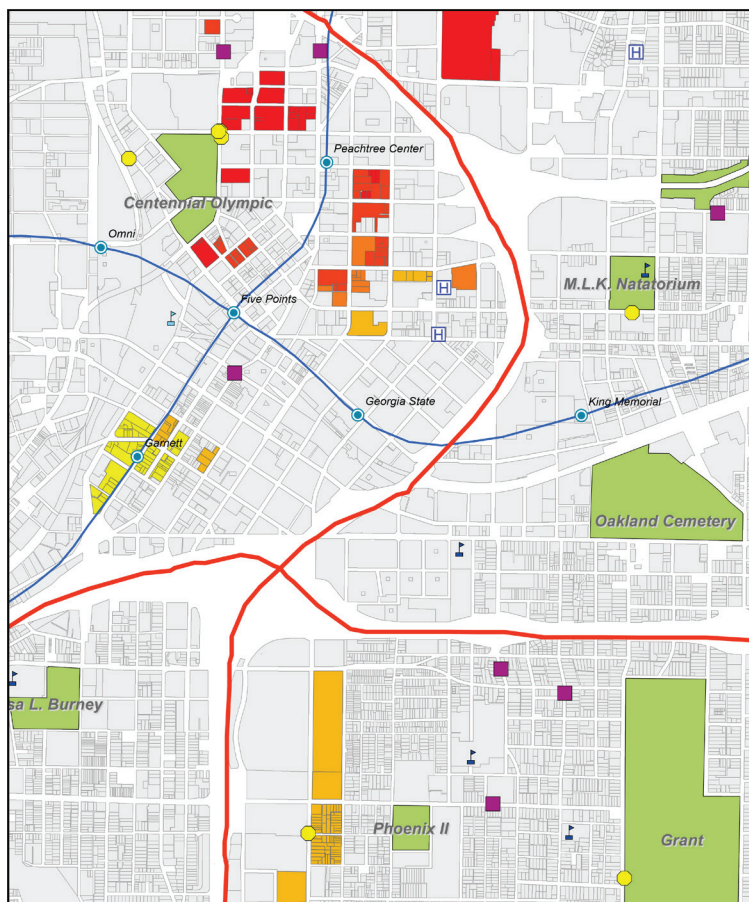
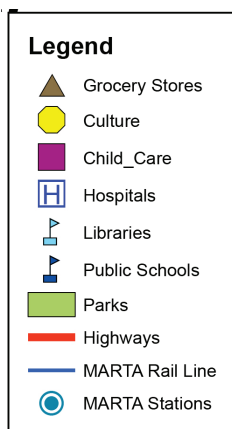
## **Amenities**

Atlanta is arguably the cultural hub of the Southeast. With world-class museums, sporting venues, and one of the country's great urban parks, the physical infrastructure is existing for families. Where the city could improve is on overall increase in the amount of park space, and diversifying spaces and amenities that appeal to older children and teenagers. When giving consideration to providing services and amenities for children many default to younger children often neglecting the needs of teens and adolescents. This is an age range where autonomy and establishing identity are priorities. As such spaces that allow and welcome the gathering of children between the ages of 12 and 17 should be included. Amenities such as skate parks, and plazas





Midtown Atlanta



Downtown Atlanta

Figure 2.8



that are welcoming, and do not perceive these youth as a threat or a nuisance. These children often desire to spend time in spaces that many adults do, such as retail shopping districts and public spaces where “hanging out” is acceptable. Unfortunately many are perceived as a nuisance and a threat, but providing a space that does not feel as if these children are encroaching on adults, yet provides an opportunity to assimilate the behavior and autonomy are essential to ensure that youths in this age range feel a part of the community.

Despite the presence of Piedmont Park, Midtown and Downtown Atlanta are limited in park space. This is particularly prevalent when visiting Piedmont Park. A typical visit on a spring weekend will see one of only two playgrounds within the park, overwhelmed with parents and children despite the lower concentration of families with children in the urban core. If Atlanta is to be serious about attracting and retaining families then it must provide additional recreation and park options for families. These parks do not have to be specifically geared to children, but they should include some components of structured and unstructured play in a safe and observable environment. Urban homes typically do not provide personal greenspace, so ensuring that there is an ample amount of parks not only works to attract families and treat the parks as their backyard, but also provides an amenity to the rest of the community. Atlanta currently has playgrounds at Piedmont Park (Midtown) and Woodruff Park (Downtown) with unique and different playgrounds and gathering spaces. Places that promote activity from those of all age ranges, while deviating from the standard structured play areas typically found in parks. These unique features make these parks memorable and new on each subsequent visit. The addition of the Atlanta BeltLine, represents an opportunity where linkages and play spaces can be unique and interesting, much like the Old Fourth

Ward Park, located east of Downtown.

## **Summary of Recommendations**

Each of the previously listed recommendations serves as a starting point for Atlanta, and lessons learned from other cities. When outlining potential policies and solutions the focus must be equally placed on parents as well as children. While creating whimsical and fun spaces for children can be beneficial to all residents, particularly children, it will not be the ultimate deciding factor for parents who make the decision on where to live. Playgrounds and unique play areas may work for families with children under the age of five, but it is where children begin to age that cities begin to lose. Providing right sized and priced housing options as well as quality education are the most important elements for parents, followed by convenience. By living in urban environments families make some sacrifices, such as private outdoor space and home size. Most people choose an urban lifestyle for convenience, proximity, and access. Ensuring that these goals remain a top priority will not only be beneficial for parents, but all residents. Encouraging development patterns that support family living, such as an even distribution of services and amenities, will ensure maximum efficiency for cities, while reducing multiple financial and time constraints for families.

*“Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.”*

–Zora Neale Hurston–

## 5 - Areas of Further Research

To understand the effects a high density urban community has on families, particularly children, a long term study needs to be executed. While recent studies have indicated that high density communities influence a child's processing of stress, it is inconclusive as to whether it does so in a negative or positive manner. While it is becoming more clear how suburban development has negatively impacted elements such as health, finances, and the environment, evidence is inconclusive as to whether there are benefits regarding elements such as mental health and social empathy to counteract the negative consequences of suburban living.

Studies should focus on several topics, age ranges, and cities. It is important to understand the impact of high density urban areas in a comprehensive manner, touching on many of the topics previously outlined. Studying those who have grown up in high density urbanized areas will provide an opportunity to study the long term impacts. Studies should also be conducted by those currently growing up in cities at staggered age brackets. This will allow for investigating and understanding how targeted age ranges are affected by urban living. Furthermore, every city is different so selecting multiple participants from each targeted city would be beneficial. This would ensure that cities and their differing levels of density and intensity are understood with regards to their impact on family and child development. This would also provide insight as to what type of elements that are part of an urban environment work positively or negatively on family and child development, further informing a city of what initiatives and programs should be pursued.

This type of study would be beneficial in understanding the more broad implications, and assuming they were positive, a city would need to

conduct its own local research. Understanding the desires and needs of families can differ at a local level. This research would be beneficial in identifying, establishing, and implementing policy solutions. Issues such as housing and density preferences need to be understood so that policy solutions influence the creation of housing units that are desired. Much like Vancouver has done, Atlanta and other cities need to conduct research regarding housing related preferences.

*"If I am going to do it, I have to change the world through her."*

–Lonnie Lynn Jr. (Common) Speaking of his daughter in the 2006 song "Be"–

## 6 - Conclusion

We must consider that the historic trends of families leaving the city must not discourage the opportunity that lies before us. We must consider that the suburban mode of living was in some regards a form of social engineering, guided through policy and subsidization. Additionally, at no point in United States history have we seen such a growing percentage of the population with the desire to live in dense urban environments by choice and not by necessity. The goal should not be to reverse social engineer, but to create new options for families. As previously stated it may not be a mode of living for everyone, but it should be an option for everyone. As we consider the future, we must recognize that there are unforeseen conditions and trends. Population projects remain nothing more than projections, and shifting economic conditions and trends can quickly alter the birth rate.

In 2012 Travel and Leisure magazine listed the top twenty most visited tourist destinations in America. Of the top ten, eight were urban locations, including the first five (Orcutt, 2012). Of the top twenty, thirteen were in cities and another five were part of the Disneyland and Disneyworld empire, a place notorious and well cited for its re-creation of traditional urban and walkable environments (Orcutt, 2012). There were no beaches, rural hinterlands, or suburban communities that made the list. As a society we have always been fascinated by cities. So much, that we now forgo the swim suits and sun screen of the beaches for comfortable walking shoes, a map, and a 7 day transit card to see some of the most storied and diverse places in the country, an experience that we have unfortunately reserved for tourism. We have priced and sized families out of cities, pummeled our urban education system, and have fabricated myths that make many with children fearful of letting their children use the city as their playground. We only allow the city to be seen

by those via a controlled and guided experience, diminishing its value, and robbing millions from experiencing a world far more interesting, and friendly than long held incorrect predispositions let many to believe.

I write this conclusion as my family and I prepare for our weekly trip to the playground at the nearby northwest corridor of the Atlanta BeltLine. Are we living the ideal urban lifestyle? No, and that has what led me to producing this research. We live on the fringe of Midtown Atlanta, and with the consideration of adding a fourth member to our family the issues that are presented in this document are the ones that we quickly realized would be impediments to us planting our roots deeper into the heart of the city. As we speak a residential rental market bubble is forming. The obsession of attracting single and young professionals has distorted the residential market to creating studios, one bedroom, and the increasingly rare two bedroom units, all at rental rates that are accelerating at an unsustainable rate. Cities such as New York and Chicago are entering the micro-unit market, and permitting high-rise condominium towers where there are less units than floors, selling for tens of millions of dollars. This has restricted and deterred many families from experiencing an urban lifestyle. It is through this research that I hope a sincere discussion can be had on who we now make cities for. A discussion where families and children not forgone conclusions as residents only of the suburbs, but where cities actively and successfully compete with their suburban counterparts to retain and attract them as engaged residents.

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